NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND STYLE

THEODORE GOODMAN

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A SERIES OF GRADED EXERCISES WITH INSTRUCTIONS IN TECHNIQUE

BY

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TO
MY WIFE

PREFACE

NARRATIVE is herein considered as a composition of stimuli intended to arouse in the reader a fantasy corresponding to the creation of the writer. Although the emphasis is placed upon the reception of a story by a possible public, there is no neglect of the processes of the writing itself. These are analyzed in detail, from the psychological as well as from the rhetorical point of view. Each instrument of the story-writer's art is treated separately; and for each there is a specific exercise designed to arouse the imagination and to train the expression to bring about a particular effect in the consciousness of the reader.

The method employed for this end is threefold:

1. On the basis of fables selected for their exemplification of certain fundamentals, there is brief and simple discussion of the following topics: (*a*) the imagination expressing itself in imagery by means of concrete nouns; (*b*) the stimulation of the senses by verbs of action: (*c*) the heightening of fantasy by dialogue and conflict; (*d*) structure as a relating of imagery to a dominant theme; and (*e*) the inclusion, within the structure, of events antedating the introduction of a tale.

2. These devices are put into practice in the planning and executing of the single scene, of the scene without dialogue, of the anecdote, and of other narrative forms which may be employed in the writing of the short story. There is consideration, likewise, of

exposition, description, and argumentation for narrative purposes.

3. The matter of plot is presented as in a workshop. There are instructions and assignments for selection of theme, for planning various plot outlines, for writing the preparatory synopsis, and for arranging this last into a frame of important sections and transitions. Special attention is given to opening and closing scenes, and to types of action and structure.

The three methods are not so much consecutive as interpenetrative. While the student is learning the elements, he seeks and develops the materials for the scenes and other forms of narrative. While he is practicing these elements, he conceives and plans a short story, to the composition and revision of which the concluding exercises are devoted.

The text offers, in addition, some comment on style, on schools of fiction, on titles, and on the preparation and the marketing of manuscripts. Such matters are dealt with incidentally, however; for no attempt is made to give information solely for itself. Whatever definitions and "theories" are included have been introduced, not as so much logic, but as so many devices offering opportunity to further the one aim of the book—a training in narrative technique.

The author accordingly trusts that no one will regard the text in the light of authoritative content, but will rather make use of the individual exercises for improvement in structure and style. The models and the comment upon them are intended, not to represent

technical knowledge, but to incite the student to technical achievement, by giving him some notion of the reactions of himself and others to a well-told tale, and by affording him opportunity and encouragement in the art of eliciting those reactions from his classmates, his friends and, possibly, the public at large.

The author is happy to recall, now that the labors of experiment and record are summed up in the present text, that the path to publication was not unaccompanied or unassisted. Especially is he grateful to three of his superiors and associates at the College of the City of New York: to Lewis Freeman Mott, the Head of the Department of the English Language and Literature, teacher, friend, and inspiration not only in this but in every interest and venture for more than a dozen years; to Paul Klapper, Dean of the School of Education, inciter of young dreams to action, confidant of the aspiring; and to Arthur Dickson, the generous colleague, receptive of fresh ideas, acutely but genially critical. Nor must there be lacking a mention of the friend from childhood, Dr. Harold J. Isaacs, in whose company and with whose assistance were thrashed out and clarified many of the theoretic elements upon which the exercises are based.

Much gratitude, likewise, is due the following publishers, writers, and authors' agents for generous permission to reprint:

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T. G.

SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS

THESE exercises are intended only incidentally as a text, They are offered, rather, as stimulation to original composition along certain specific lines. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the instructor will regard the content of the chapter as incidental preparation for the main issue—the planning and the writing of a narrative by the individual student. The class itself should be aware of this aim; and the wise teacher will commence the year by saying: "You will be required to study the assignment carefully, for complete understanding of the devices you are to employ. But the proof of your mastery of the principles of the lesson will lie in your ability to cudgel your brains for your own material, and then to express it, as the text advises, to the best of your ability."

Accordingly, the assignment in every case should be, not merely to read the chapter, but to prepare for statement in class two or three "ideas" for discussion and composition. In the case of Chapter I, for example, the student should be ready to give a verbal sketch of several fables suitable for the Moral, *Practice what you preach:* and the discussion should be such as to guide him in the choice and the amplification of the freshest, most attractive imagery. After a few of the readier members of the class have broken the ice with their contributions, it would be wise to devote the remaining time to those who, for one reason or another, find it difficult to get under way.

One great advantage of discussion is the opportunity for occasional, necessary review. The labors of invention may often be lightened by a brief résumé of theory. The teacher asks: "What is the principle of to-day's lesson?

How may we apply it in getting Jones out of his rut?" The momentary lull which follows is soon bound to give way to suggestions, and the seemingly hopeless problem finds many answers instead of one. It would be quite possible, for example, that a student who has a good theme for the exercise in Chapter III should be considerably at a loss as to how to develop it, and that the class should be somewhat slow in coming to assistance. Recourse should then be had to some such questioning as this: "Upon what sense-impressions has the writer relied? Would it be possible to draw upon other senses? What verbs of action, pertinent to the theme, would you suggest for the stimulation of the reader's *hearing?* of his *touch?* of his *kinæsthetic* centers?" In a word, no effort should be spared in bringing theory to bear upon the case in point, since the class is thus made further aware of the utility of specific principles as guides of practice.

When the written theme comes up for criticism, the immediate emphasis should be upon the matter of the current chapter. Has that lesson been learned? Does the writer show sufficient grasp of that narrative element to wield it with skill, with interest? Does his effort in connection with Chapter IV indicate a mastery of dialogue? Do the characters speak a natural, or a bookish tongue? Is the speech concise and rapid, or does it dawdle insufferably over inconsequential details? The opinion of the class is inestimable in this connection. Not only are the verdicts more convincing than when delivered out of authority, but the beginner has excellent training in studying and writing for a "public."

After the discussion of the rendering of the principle of the lesson, there should be briefer comment on the writer's skill in employing devices learned previously. Every attempt should be made to relate criticism to the main business of narrative. A lack of transition, or a

faulty transition, for instance, should, if possible, be condemned as an omission or a bungling of essential imagery. The author has revised his own marginalia of correction as follows: for Faulty Diction, he now writes Feeble Imagery, Ill-Chosen Verb of Action, Sense Appeal Blurred, Sense Appeal Lacking, or Change of Sense Appeal Advisable; for Lack of Unity or Coherence, he substitutes Off the Point, Not Related to Central (or Preceding) Imagery, Digression from Main Conflict; for Dull or Uninteresting he writes Dialogue Indicated, Conflict Lapses, Verbs Colorless. After a time, the students become accustomed to the newer terminology; but the loss in the freshness of its challenge is compensated by a desire to employ the terms in class-room discussion. So long as the teacher sees to it that there is no accompanying strut of pedantry, the novel words will serve to revitalize meanings stale with familiarity.

So much for general procedure.

As regards the use of the various elements of which the book is composed, the teacher must be guided by conditions. If he is to give a year of narrative, he will perhaps find it profitable to observe the sequence of chapters. Experience has tended to show that many of the benefits of the present method arise from the arrangement of the parts. These progress from simple to more and more difficult, by calculated stages. Furthermore, attention has been paid to alternation of topics, not merely for variety and interest, but more especially to afford occasion, while the simpler exercises are being written, for the collection and examination of the materials of the more difficult exercises toward the end of the book. Each chapter should take about a week of the course to complete; so that there should be time for occasional review of the mechanics of composition, should necessity dictate, or for the writing of more than one story in the final weeks of the year.

In case the course is only for one semester, or in case narrative is but one of the forms studied, it is possible, by observing certain chapter sequences, to treat narrative more briefly and with greater specialization, according to the preference of the instructor, the demands of the curriculum, or the needs of the students. The following table will be of assistance in offering varieties of choice:

I. Chapters I, III, IV, VI, VII, and IX.

Elementary Narrative. The fundamental principles: Imagery, Fantasy, Action, Dialogue, Conflict, and Structure.

The exercises are on the writing of fables and allegories.

II. Chapters II, V, and VIII.

Materials of Narrative. The collection of clippings, etc. Amplifying the materials by means of sense impressions and synonyms.

III. Chapters X, XII, XIV, XVI, XVIII, and XX.

Sections of the Short Story. The Scene, with and without Dialogue; the Anecdote, etc. Description, Exposition, and Argument in Narrative.

IV. Chapters XI, XIII, XV, XVII, XIX, XXI, XXII and XXIV.

The Plot of the Short Story. Arranging the material. Plotting the story proper. The Preparatory synopsis. The plan by scenes and other sections. The drafting of the Climactic Scene, the Introduction, the Body. Types of Structure. Transitions. Revision.

V. Chapters XXIII, XXIV, and XXV

Miscellaneous. Style. Titles. Preparation and marketing of the manuscript.

Since each chapter requires about a week to complete the individual instructor may be guided in his choice by the amount of time at his disposal. For a course of one semester (or for thirty hours of elementary narrative) the com-

bination of sequences I and III, together with Chapter II, has produced the most satisfactory results.

It is a very good thing, occasionally, to interrupt the routine of composition by introducing a student report, based either on a group of chapters in some volume on the short story, or on a masterpiece of fiction directly. In this connection, the lists of Suggested Readings appended to the chapters will be found useful. The most interesting variant of all is the discussion of some well-written tale by the entire class, especially if there be enough copies to go around. The author has often requested the students to come to class with the current issue of a fiction magazine containing something worth analyzing. For the same purpose, two magazines that specialize in reprinted pieces have proved valuable: *The Golden Book*,[1] and *The Famous Story Magazine*.[2] The nature of the reports may be gathered from the following brief list:

Imagery in Hans Christian Andersen, Lord Dunsany, Edna Ferber, Irvin S. Cobb, Joseph Hergesheimer, Joseph Conrad, Prosper Mérimée, Konrad Berkovici, etc.

Verbs of Action in Jack London, Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stevenson, Wilbur Daniel Steele, etc.

Dialogue in Edith Wharton, Fannie Hurst, Michael Arlen, Carl Van Vechten, Booth Tarkington, etc.

Inversion in Sherwood Anderson, A. Conan Doyle, Frank Swinnerton, etc.

Naturally, it is best to limit the report to one story by the author under consideration. Here the interests of the teacher must play a large part in guiding the selection.

In many other respects, too, the instructor will be influenced by his own judgment in contributing additional

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[1] Published by the Review of Reviews Corporation, 55 Fifth Avenue, New York.

[2] *The Famous Story Magazine*, 461 Eighth Avenue, New York.

material, and in diminishing or augmenting the allotment of time for this or that chapter. No good teacher is slave to a text. A book can do no more than provide the substance of the lesson. Such a contribution, in the field of narrative composition, would justify the publishing of a new work; and the present volume is issued, not with the expectation of making two short story writers grow where but one grew before, but with the simple hope that in these pages both instructor and student may find the opportunity for more exact training in the practice of a great art.

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NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND STYLE

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Chapter I

THE IMAGE AND THE STORY; FANTASY

I

A BASEBALL bat may be wielded by a Babe Ruth or by some average citizen like you or me. Kreisler is an inspiration to thousands of young violinists who, though they may never play so well as he, can nevertheless develop in themselves that measure of talent which nature has given them in music. We are all artists in proportion as we appreciate excellent performance. The part we play as spectators and listeners is no doubt passive. Yet it indicates some degree of power. Is there any one who does not believe that he might write a good book if he "could only get around to it"? Quite unliterary people, in the logs of great wrecks, in messages sent from besieged cities, in simple letters written under stress of feeling, have composed fragments which critics have applauded.

There is every reason for believing that a little study and some patient effort would develop in many an inexpressive soul abilities otherwise never even suspected. This would seem especially true of narrative. We are

all born story-tellers. How else should you be able to relate to a friend what happened at the wonderful party the Smiths gave last Saturday night? When you write home from a distance of the events of your trip, or in ordinary conversation repeat an anecdote, you are a narrator. Every one is. Why not? Life is all action; and speech, consciously or unconsciously, is a magazine of stories.

Of course, that does not make every acorn an oak, or every oak a redwood. You are not going to equal "The Gold Bug" in your first attempt. As a matter of fact, it would be a sensible thing not to try to equal it in your first attempt. If you were learning carpentry, you would begin, not by building a cottage, but by making a book end. So in narration it would seem wise to grow into the writing of the more complex forms by easy gradations from some beginning just simple enough to be done well. The smaller the job, the better. You can comprehend the whole of it in a glance. There is comparatively little danger of that great failing in any trade—a shortage of material.

Hence in these exercises we are going to commence with fables. We are going to examine each for the single element of narrative it exemplifies, and then we are going to go and do likewise. When we know these simple forms, we shall advance to the higher ones.

There will be inspiration. No story can be written without it. But we shall not rely on inspiration entirely, and certainly not on the variety which consists of chewing the end of a pencil and looking out of the

window. Our variety shall be the one which arises naturally from the desire to do a definite job well, and the confidence that, because it is within our powers, we can do it well.

II

MODEL 1. *The Moon and Her Cloak*

Once the Moon begged her mother: "Make me a pretty cloak!" "My daughter," the mother chided, "tell me how I am possibly to make a cloak to fit you, when you are at one time a Crescent, at another a Full Moon, and very often no Moon of any sort!"

The moon cannot have her cloak because she changes shape too often. The same, of course, may be said of anything whose form varies considerably. For example, the river is in one place a trickling brook; in others, a broad stream, a waterfall, a current in some bay. If we wish, we can substitute the one group of concrete nouns for the other, leaving the structure and the point as before, but creating a change of image. The possibility of interchange rests on the fact that *moon* and *river* have one abstract quality in common—*variability.*

That some image is necessary, however, becomes evident the moment we attempt to use the pictureless word *variability* itself:

Variability and Her Cloak

Once Variability begged her mother: "Make me a pretty cloak!" "My child," the mother chided, "tell me how I am possibly to make a cloak to fit you, when you

are at one time Variability, at another, Variability, and very often Variability!"

The result is mere words. More than that, the little story is destroyed. Even if we were to employ such synonyms as *changeability* or *alterability,* there would be no improvement; for, in themselves, ideas are not pictures.

Some image, therefore, is needed. Here we have an indispensable feature, a *sine qua non,* of narrative. Once that is granted, the precise image will often be found to be of only relative importance. One picture may often be employed in place of another, so long as they possess in common the essential quality of the abstraction on which the little tale is founded. Thus, on the basis of our model, by simple substitution of image, we may have the fable of

The Wind and Her Cloak

Once the Wind begged her mother: "Make me a pretty cloak!" "My child," the mother chided, "tell me how I am possibly to make a cloak to fit you, when you are at one time a Breeze, at another a Hurricane, and very often no Wind of any sort!"

Allowing for the fact that *moon* affords a better picture here than *wind,* the two fables are actually equivalent. They differ only in their central images. In either case, every recurrence of the picture contains sufficient change to drive home the point and to provide a certain freshness. It would not do, for example, if one were re-writing the fable with *light*

as the heroine, to speak of *bright light, feeble light, no light.* The effect would be, not recurrence of the image, but mere, deadly repetition of words. A better group would be *candle flame, hearth blaze, forest fire.* These include the idea of *light* in a series of pictures not merely different in themselves, but different in wording, so that each one is vivid.

In the matter of substitution, our little fable may be likened to a small block of wood carrying a design upon its face. Certain elements of the composition are detachable, leaving openings into which one may fit pegs or plugs of another color, but of the same ornamental form. That is what images are to narrative—without them it gapes, it is blank, empty, meaningless.

One would err, however, in believing that images are wooden. They are more than mere plugs or patches of color. They are living things, capable of stirring the reader's mind to re-create them. They must therefore be so worded as to stimulate the senses to a variety of exercise. To the inner eye, *crescent, full moon, no moon* are different pictures, though they deal with one thing. So, to the ear, or to the sense of touch in the skin, *breeze* and *hurricane* are vastly dissimilar images of *wind.* Narrative requires images. It requires, moreover, a constant differentiation of them in accordance with some unifying idea. It requires, most of all, a variety in the very wording; for over the gulf that separates the writer's intention from the reader's understanding, the sole bridge is the spoken or the written word.

The author must therefore possess or develop a ready vocabulary of concrete terms. He must train his senses to observe acutely, his speech to express exactly and with variety. In no connection is this more imperative than in the manipulation of images—or more difficult. Here, if anywhere, would it be wise to begin with a simple exercise.

Before reading further, turn back to Model 1, and re-fashion it by substituting for the central image *moon* some such word as *sea, darkness, weather,* or one of your own discovering. Make the substitution throughout in a series of images that will waken one of the reader's senses to keen, delightful activity. Compose in your head, if you wish; but be sure to write the result down on paper. Thus you will become, no matter in how elementary a sense, a writer of narrative.

III

"Once the Moon begged——"

We need go no further to realize that what we have here is certainly not a lesson in astronomy. The real moon, we know, is "dead," even as a heavenly body. It therefore cannot "ask" any one anything; or have a mother; or have use for a cloak, little or big. Try to picture the moon's mother—or a befitting garment!

The fact is that we have in this deceptively simple little tale the union of two narratives: On the one hand, there is the business of the phases of the moon, a sequence of celestial events of great importance to farmers, travelers and lovers. On the other hand—

and how cunningly—there is hinted the story of any little girl who wishes a new cloak, but who cannot have it because she is growing too quickly to have it fit her well for any length of time. Either of these tales, alone, would occur to us as perfectly natural. Put them together, and you have the fantastic situation in which an inanimate body exercises not merely speech, but similar human powers and desires!

If you will stop for a moment to recall your figures of speech, you will remember that a *metaphor* is a comparison of two things unlike save in one respect—the *roses* of her *cheek;* his *heart* of a *lion.* When, furthermore, we compare animals or inanimate things with man, giving the former the powers of the latter, we have *personification:* "Once the Moon begged her mother: 'Make me a pretty cloak!'" An expanded metaphor of this sort, amounting to a little story with a "moral," is precisely what we have in Model 1—a *fable.*

Aristotle, in his *Poetics,* says that the difference between history and poetry (in poetry he includes drama, and therefore narrative) is that history relates what *is,* whereas poetry, or fiction, tells what *ought to be.* One might add, for modern purposes, that fiction deals with the magic realm of *maybe.* History and biography abound in images which report, as faithfully as words may reproduce fact, certain actual events. But fiction, although it is based on fact, as we saw in the two stories that made up Model 1, adds to the true a twist of what is known as fantasy.

Fantasy is the combining of images as they do not appear originally to the senses, on the basis of association, or resemblance.

Hence arise all our figures of speech, fables, allegories, and every species of fiction. Even the realist is fanciful; for he writes, not of real people, like Julius Cæsar or your cousin's wife, but of creatures of his imagination. Their traits and experiences he has culled from the actual, but he has rearranged them to suit his needs and temper. Such a writer will often thus fashion a personality more durable than the real, as Thackeray did in Becky Sharp. Yet, although you and I may turn from *Vanity Fair* almost confident that we have met the woman—Thackeray never did!

There is one more point to add concerning the nature of fantasy: The choice of the two things to be compared requires much more than a single basis of likeness. The function of harmonious taste is exquisite and important. The lovely heroine's cheek is not to be compared to beet-soup simply because both are red. Similarly, in re-writing Model 1, one cannot substitute for *moon* the name of anything at all that happens to be variable. *Sulphur,* for example, may be had as solid, powder, and fluid; but unfortunately, sulphur smells, and in other ways is far from being the pretty image implicitly demanded in the hidden story of the child who wishes a little cloak that will fit her well.

Untrained writers are often guilty of offenses arising from incongruity of fantasy. In fables, for instance, they tend to forget that while the moral

precept relates to human conduct, *it must be plausible animal behavior that provides the imagery.* Failure to observe this simple criterion results in ludicrous incongruity: a dog is made to put on armor; a sheep leads its young "by the hand"; rabbits go bicycling. Some such mixtures of fantasy are permissible because we are familiar with them in real life: a dog goes motoring, that is, is taken for a ride.

In other words, fantasy is no mere mechanical juxtaposition of images similar in one respect. There must play over and about the whole process a whimsical tact, imaginative enough to be fertile, tasteful enough to be harmonious.

The person who makes written words arouse interesting fantasies in the mind of the reader is a writer of fictitious narrative.

Exercises

A. *Narrative Style: The Idea and the Image*

1. If we wish to express the abstraction *fear* in an image, we may say *blanched cheek, arrested pulse, clammy sweat, pitiful scream,* depending on the sense organ of the reader to be stimulated. Or we may write a whole sentence: *At the sight of the Cobra, the Sparrow stood stock still, without power to move a feather.*

For three of the following ideas or abstractions write a number of words, phrases, or sentences which shall stimulate the senses of a reader to produce images relating to animals:

joy	impulsiveness	protection
rage	timidity	treachery
despondency	helplessness	triumph
reflection	courage	death

EXAMPLE:

Helplessness—Broken wing, Fish out of water, lost Kitten, Fox in trap.

The overturned Turtle now confessed himself beaten.

2. Create lists of images for three ideas of your own.

3. Read a narrative passage in some book or magazine, and determine what idea lies behind the images of this or that sentence.

B. *Narrative: Re-writing a Fable by Substitution and Expansion of the Central Image*

MODEL 2. *The Two Crabs*

An old Crab once criticized a young one for walking crooked. "My venerable friend," retorted the young Crab, "would you mind demonstrating the correct fashion? When I see you walk straight, I will try to do likewise."

MORAL: Practice what you preach.

Here the central image of the crab's crooked walk is made to teach the lesson that example is better than precept. By simple substitution we may accomplish the same end in the fable of

Donkey and Son

A Donkey once begged his son not to sing so frightfully out of tune.

"Dad," the younger replied, "let me hear you run up and down a few scales without flatting, will you? When I hear you keep to pitch, I'll go and do likewise."

MORAL: Practice what you preach.

The following freshman theme illustrates what may be accomplished by varying and amplifying the central image with well-chosen details:

The Hen That Taught Swimming

A Hen observed some young Ducks in swimming, and hastened to criticize them. "How awkwardly you move your feet!" she cried. "Why don't you paddle more smoothly? Why do you shake your backs so?"

"Show us how," one Duckling demanded.

"Not now, little one," she replied. "I am too tired."

Meanwhile, two of the "little ones" stole behind her and pushed her in. Had it not been for the pity of several of her intended pupils, she would surely have drowned.

"Well, madam," one of the rescuers advised, when the Hen was once again safely on land, "you had better not come back to give us the second lesson till you have taken at least one, yourself!"

MORAL: Practice what you preach.

Assignment:

To express the moral

Practice what you preach

write a fable to fit one of the following titles:

THE PIG WHO WOULD REFORMER BE
THE CRITICAL SLOTH
DR. MOLE, OPTICIAN
THE FROG AND HIS BEAUTY PARLOR

or use one of the following central images:

heavy elephant
cruel lion
thieving magpie
silly goose
conceited peacock
cowardly ostrich
ragged book agent selling a volume on success

or invent a suitable image *of your own.*

If you have an aversion for this moral, write a fable advising people *not* to practice what they preach. Or perhaps you may wish to develop the original moral ironically.

NOTE: The names of the animal or inanimate "characters" are capitalized.

Be sure to have a good title for this exercise, and in fact for every exercise in the course.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Fictitious Narrative

ANDERSEN, H. C.—*Fairy Tales.*
Fables of Æsop, La Fontaine, Gay.
JACOBS, J.—*Reynard the Fox.*
KIPLING, Rudyard—*Jungle Books.*
LONDON, Jack—*Call of the Wild; Jerry of the Islands; Michael, Brother of Jerry.*

Criticism and Rhetoric

ARISTOTLE.—*Poetics.*
BEZARD, J.—*My Class in Composition*, translated and adapted by Phyllis Robbins (Harvard University Press, 1923).
SYMONS, Arthur—*The Symbolist Moment.*

Psychology

BETTS, G. H.—*Distribution and Functions of Mental Imagery* (Teachers College, Columbia University, 1909).
DEWEY, John—*How We Think* (Heath, 1910), Chapter I.

Chapter II

THE GATHERING OF MATERIALS; NEWS CLIPPINGS

For one Macaulay of encyclopedic memory, for one Byron of fluid facility, there are thousands of writers, including such great ones as Balzac and Henry James, who have found it impossible to get along without a notebook, or notes of some sort. Memory has a way of dying down, like the wind, at some crucial moment. More grave than that, however, is the peril of insufficient preparation, halting many a manuscript unexpectedly, and terminating others just outside the clever introduction that promised so well!

To buttress his recollection, to garner his material, the beginner should spend at least twice as much time, thought, and energy in gathering the raw stuff of narrative as in composing or writing. The method he pursues may be a matter of inclination. It is, of course, vastly less important than the loving, intelligent effort he brings to it. Yet, since any method, even a borrowed one, is to be preferred to vague drifting—especially for practice—it will be the purpose of this chapter, and others like it, to lay before the amateur a variety of devices, both for his choice and for his wider training.

The simplest procedure is that of collecting and

classifying news-stories clipped from the papers. What one does is merely to cut out and stow away for later reference such items as seem potentially valuable for fiction. The reasons for going to this source are as plentiful as most of them are obvious. The press is the mirror of many of the facts, or certainly the events, of life. The bare recital of some happening, such as a trial in court, or an accident, will often fire the mind to fancy the images of a stirring conflict. The last letter of a suicide will bring to light a strange quirk in character. The mere observation of the human pageant-in-print, from day to day, will evoke generalizations on life which may be suitable for themes. Occasionally, but not often, a half column will contain the skeleton of a plot ready to be fleshed into fiction by means of materials gleaned from other clippings, or from experience, or from hearsay. The desideratum for the beginner is that, even before he is ready to weave tapestries out of his own psyche, he may go to an external agency for the threads of exercise.

Since the personal reaction is so varied, it is of course hard to say which stories should be clipped, and which not. One mind will see possibilities of fiction where another is bored. As a matter of fact, good tales lie in wait everywhere for the right tongue to tell them, as O. Henry demonstrated in his "Municipal Report." Each author must determine the matter, even after discussion with others, for himself. Young writers are everywhere solemnly enjoined not to dally with themes that are trite, disgusting, or impossible.

Certainly it would take a genius to make a masterpiece of such material. Yet, for commercial purposes, magazines do print stories whose themes are trite, disgusting, impossible. Here is a question for the individual æsthetic, if not the conscience.

One consideration, however, would seem at least sensible. The material should in some way rouse the mind to create images abundantly. That is merely another way of saying that the creative imagination must be brought to function. It is not necessary that an entire news article should stimulate. Indeed, such a result is generally unlikely. What happens in most cases is that some sentence or phrase, bearing a detail significant in its novelty, sets the wheels of fancy turning eagerly. The collapse of an old building, for example, is far less interesting than the fact that the ruin was brought about by certain white, wood-eating ants known as termites. Here we have a force of biological nature bordering almost on the invisible, the supernatural. One has only to conceive of some one—preferably a negro—laying a *white curse* on the home of an injurer—and the germ of a story begins to work in the brain.

Apprentices, however, should look for simpler elements than germs of stories. A theme is a rare and excellent thing, and should always be entered in the notebook as soon as it drops from heaven; but the execution had better be delayed until one has mastered the lesser units—the anecdote and the scene. When we have done the five or six fables which constitute the

A B C of this book, we shall go on to the writing of single scenes and similar passages. These will be to the earlier elements what words are to the letters of the alphabet. And since one must have material even for single scenes—material in abundance from which to select the best—it is necessary, as soon as possible, to begin collecting.

Read more than one newspaper. Read carefully, ever on the watch for the unusual, for anything which would surprise and interest others as it does you. It is a good thing to compare "finds" with classmates or to discuss them in conversation with friends, apparently for mere conversation, but actually to see whether people turn away or turn to listen. A coincidence, involving destruction or rescue when the other outcome seemed inevitable, is good stuff. An expensive and evidently much-used violin, found in the room of a dead beggar, forces us to ask: "Who—what was he? How did he get that fiddle? Why didn't he pawn it and improve his state?" till the wheels of romance begin to spin. Can you imagine the childhood birthday, when the father brought the instrument home, amid quite different surroundings, perhaps in a far-off land? Can you imagine the boy's joy as at a dream come true? Perhaps, in some shadowy corner, the mother stands watchful and dubious, knowing that a wayward impulse goes with the child's talent, and somehow dreading the future. If the article starts such fancies in your head, then reach for the scissors forthwith. You may never get a story there; but you

have a fine group of scenes to try your hand on when the right time comes.

While you are searching for the unusual, the amazing, try if possible to find it not merely sparkling from the commonplace, but more especially from the commonplace as you know it in your locality, amid your kind, in occupations and customs known to you. Thus your images, arising from first hand, will shine true to the inner eye of the reader, and you will be spared the humiliation of the blundered detail. If the clipping deals with persons and events remote from your experience, try to transplant the situation nearer home. The result—serious or comic—will amaze you by the ease with which you can accomplish it. Meanwhile the process will be accompanied by the creation of any number of scenes rich with the dramatic.

For the present we shall not concern ourselves with writing of any sort, but shall content ourselves with the finding, sorting, and preserving of a mass of clippings. If you must wield a pencil, use it to underline the *specific, printed* sentence that started you off. For the rest, every time you add to your collection, re-read the old ones, and muse over them, turning them ever and again in mind for the kaleidoscopic patterns they will present to the inner sense. Perhaps you yourself will not wish to write, out of sheer bewilderment as to what to say. The whimsies will change so, from reading to reading, the tricksy things! You won't forget them—never fear! They will turn and twist in what some psychologists would call your sub-

conscious, taking on new stuff even when your mind is off them, until they pop out, unexpectedly it may be, later, with the most amazing improvements. That is —if you *keep* the clippings, and keep *reading* them.

Here a consideration of almost housekeeping practicality arises. Bits of paper, loosely carried in pockets or pocketbooks, or more loosely left in drawers or atop bureaus, have a way of crumpling, tearing, vanishing. There is need of a headquarters, a filing system. In a word, the best way to keep them is to keep them all together, preferably in an oak-tag portfolio about twelve inches by five, big enough to hold them all, and small enough to be carried to class or elsewhere at need. When the number of clippings makes it a bit hard to find any one of them, sort them according to some system of your own, into small commercial envelopes. These you may label with appropriate headings, and carry in the portfolio. When they wear out from use, you can replace them more readily than you could replace a clipping illegible with abuse.

If you find no better method of classification, the assignment below will help get you started. But, as soon as possible, get the clippings into some arrangement that will make them part of you. Ultimately, if they are to be of any use to you, they must emerge as fiction from the point of your pen, as the result of your cogitation.

Do not fail to read at least one of the references in the list of suggested readings. They contain valuable

advice concerning the gathering of material for narrative composition.

Exercise

Clip and preserve in your portfolio for reading in class a week from to-day, at least three newspaper stories to fit each of the following categories. Be sure that you have in mind one good scene to justify every clipping. (If necessary, underline the sentence that started you off.)

An amazing incident
A new, humorous "stunt"
An unusual combination of ordinary events
A queer trait of character
A powerful emotion
A story that aroused emotion in you

Suggested Readings

How to Gather Material for Fiction

Baker, H. T.—*The Contemporary Short Story* (Heath, 1916), Chapters I and II.

Clark, Glenn—*A Manual of the Short Story Art* (Macmillan, 1922), Chapter VI.

Esenwein, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story* (Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, 1909), Part II, Chapters I, II, and III.

Phillips, H. A.—*The Plot of the Short Story* (Stanhope-Dodge, 1912), Chapter XV.

Uzzell, Thomas H.—*Narrative Technique* (Harcourt, Brace, 1923), Chapter III.

Chapter III

STIMULATING THE SENSES: VERBS OF ACTION

I

A FREQUENT criticism of writers is: "The idea is there, but the writing is dead. It doesn't move." No story-teller can afford to have this said of him, with justice, by a considerable body of readers.

How may one develop a lively style?

II

MODEL 3. *The Traveling Friends*

Two men were traveling through a dense forest, when abruptly they heard a Bear making in their direction. One of the men, in great fear, climbed up a tree and concealed himself. His companion, finding himself thus deserted and alone, threw himself on the ground and feigned death, for he had once been told that no Bear will touch a dead body. So he lay motionless, even when the Bear came up to him and sniffed him all over. As a result, the beast, supposing him to be dead, walked off. Then the coward came down from the tree and tried to make a jest of the whole thing. "What was it the Bear whispered to you?" he asked. "I noticed he stuck his snout to your ear for some time."

"Oh, nothing," the other replied. "Just a warning that in the future I might better choose my friends from among those who do not flee in the heat of battle."

The point here is that one should beware of fair-weather friends. This is brought out by but a few images—a bear, two men, some trees. Note more particularly, however, that the images are made to *move.* One of the men *climbs* a tree; the other *throws* himself on the ground and *feigns death;* the bear *comes up, sniffs, walks off.* What the fable presents, therefore, is not merely a picture, but a *moving picture,* a picture of *events.* This element of our craft we shall call action. It is the distinctive feature of narrative writing.[1]

In Chapter I we saw that images may be presented by concrete nouns—*moon, river, wind.* Action, on the other hand, depends largely on verbs, or verbals, such as *traveling, heard, climbed, finding, threw, feigned,* and others in the model above. It is extremely important for the action of a story, therefore, that the verbs be well chosen, for then they bring the special quality of certain movements to the mind's eye. The bear, for example, is depicted as *sniffing;* and the effect is vivid. Contrariwise, when the verbs are ill-chosen, the picture loses brightness. In the model, the bear *comes* up to the prostrate figure. He should *waddle.* The coward who *climbed* the tree might better have been made to *scramble up.*

Observe, again, that while much emphasis is placed upon what the men and the bear *do,* there is only passing reference to what they *think* and *feel.* The inner

[1] Action in the large sense, as the engine of plot, will be dealt with in later chapters.

processes are expressed in elements grammatically subordinate, such as phrases: *in great fear, seeing that he had no chance, supposing him to be dead.* One reason for this is that the names of thoughts and feelings are abstract nouns, which in narrative should be subordinated to concrete imagery, or else translated into concrete imagery. The phrase *in great fear* might, for example, be rendered *in great trembling. Fear,* an abstraction, is not immediately imagistic. *Trembling,* which at once arouses a visual and muscular sympathy in the consciousness of the reader, starts the required feeling from its very roots.

In certain varieties of stories, thoughts and feelings are necessarily prominent. In no story is it possible to omit reference to them entirely. In stories of action, however, the aim must be to present images of external movement in swift succession and in accordance with a plan that is consistent and complete.

III

Did it occur to you, when mention was made above of "moving picture," that the cinema is no more or less than a swift succession of images? The fight at the cliff's edge, with the villain's body hurtling into the abyss, bounding against bowlders, and finally lodging over the crotch of some stout branch—these, on the sections of the film, are "still" photographs, merged by the fast whirl of the operator's wheel into a continuous "story." Naturally, since the organ of re-

ception is the eye, the imagery here is fundamentally optical; and we name such pictures *visual images.*

Yet it requires but a moment's reflection to realize that the movies stimulate more than the one sense of sight. When Rex, the Wolfhound of the Northwest, sits up suddenly and flattens his long ears against his head, we not merely see, but try to *listen.* So that when, the next instant, the screen reveals the timber wolves stretching their throats and opening their mouths on the distant peak, we actually hear (observe, next time, if you don't believe it) the far-off, menacing howls, etc. Thus, through the visual, is stimulated the *auditory.*

The same is true of the other senses:

The hero's nostrils and chest expand—A puff of white curls from the tenement window—Smoke!—and we have the *olfactory* sense, or sense of smell.

The tramp steals the pie, sneaks off to a hedge, and with the first huge bite re-awakens the taste of crust and baked apple in the *gustatory* centers of every envious mouth in the audience.

So, too, with the *tactile* sensations of the skin—touch or pressure, cold and heat. It may be mid-July as you sit watching the silver screen; but if the old trapper enters the cabin and stamps the snow from his shoes, your toes will tingle faintly with the memory of December frosts. When the detective's hand falls on the shoulder of the suspect, does it not fall on yours?

The *organic* sensations are more rarely awakened; yet they, too, come into play. The shipwrecked mari-

ners perish of thirst on their tropic raft—and your throat goes dry. And when the fat man comes into the dentist's office with his big swollen jowl in a sling—does no twinge of pain stir momentarily in some once harassed molar—even as you laugh?

A most important group of images, little understood, and therefore difficult to define, are those that go under the name of *kinæsthetic*. They are peculiarly interesting to the writer of narrative because they have to do with the movement of parts of the body—the strain and release of leg muscles in running upstairs, or of neck muscles in yawning, turning the head, nodding. They have something to do, moreover, with one's awareness of the disposition of the various parts of the body, so that you know just how your foot is bent in relation to your shin, even at night, under the covers. When the hero "swings on" the treacherous peon, and the little boy in the gallery cannot restrain a similar movement of his fist, we have a kinæsthetic response that is being enacted, more restrainedly and less obviously, in every right arm in the house. It may safely be said that the writer who can stimulate the kinæsthetic imagery of his audience has a most subtle key to the great riddle of action.

The "five senses" are at least seven in number—the seven notes of the imagistic scale upon which the story-teller, consciously or unconsciously, must build his melodies, his harmonies. The visual and the auditory he will use most commonly, since sight and hearing are of the widest appeal. Yet he will lack in cunning

if he fail to take advantage of the rich variety of vividness potential in the gustatory, the tactile, the olfactory, the organic, the kinæsthetic. In so far as his words arouse his readers' senses to *action,* he is a writer of narrative style.

IV

It is not easy to make a story out of pictures that must be kept moving. The movies themselves, to resume the comparison, often give evidence of the difficulty. Every time printed words, such as "That night" or "Later" are thrown on the screen, the flow of images is interrupted by something merely verbal, and often merely abstract. In badly managed films, or films badly "cut," as we have all known to our irritation, the scene is at times shifted too abruptly. We see a man sitting in his library, and then on his horse, without the slightest warning of his going outdoors! Again, if the light shines through the blank strip at the end of the reel, nothing appears on the screen at all. Up-to-date manufacturers try to obviate this vapidity by making the tail-strip carry the trade-mark emblem. In all three of the above examples, what happens is that something other than an image appears on the screen, or that some action is omitted.

The opposite fault may also occur, and in various ways; that is, the story is halted past endurance by scenes that have little or no bearing on the plot. A character of only incidental connection will enjoy the entire screen alone. while we await in anxiety the

outcome of the great train-automobile race. Or else the star will pace up and down the terrace, monotonously, for five or ten minutes, without "registering" deliberation any the more richly than he could have, and did, in the first. Or else some close-up will follow the course of a single tear down the old mother's furrowed cheek over an interval sufficient for an enterprising weeper to add to the mean rainfall of the region.

These errors in construction may be found equally in printed narrative. They are so damaging to meaning and to style that it will profit us to dwell on them here at length. In every case, the examples listed below are taken from student narratives. Read them carefully, keep them ever in mind; for, do what you may, you will at one time or another fall from grace as did these unlucky young authors!

Errors in the Expression of Imagery

A. *The Omission of the Image*

1. *No Image*

Since there is no such fowl as the Etcetera Bird, we need not point out the blank in the following:

> Some of our large friends were present—the eagle, the hawk, *etc.*, and also some of our little friends—the woodpecker, the canary, *etc.*

2. *Image Omitted in Sequence*

From a fable concerning an impulsive duck and a cautious one who have to cross a busy road:

He was right, for he did beat his friend to the pond. On the return, however, when the same circumstances presented themselves, and when the rash duck again left his friend behind, luck turned against him, and he was killed.

Killed—how? By a hoof? By a wheel? Was it the iron rim of a cart, or the balloon tire of a motor car? The lack of one image here makes the whole picture vague, a fault doubly damnable, for it occurs at the end of the little tale, where vividness is most to be desired. Note, moreover, the clause *when the same circumstances presented themselves.* The abstractness could have been made concrete by writing: *though the dust rose as thick as ever about the flashing spokes.*

3. *Idea for Image*

A student wrote the following sentences in the genuine belief that they expressed the images of his mind's eye:

He knew that he would be taking a chance in committing robbery, but that was the only way out. Luck was against him, and he was brought to justice.

Asked where the images were, the author scratched his chin sheepishly and re-wrote the passage thus:

He knew that the moment he snatched the loaf and ran, the whole store would empty after him; but the pain of his hunger would not be denied. It was as he feared. Some one's eye caught him at it. Some one's voice cried "Thief!" Some one's foot tripped him. And before he rose, a bluecoat had him by the elbow.

His error is one of the commonest. It arises from setting down the first rubber-stamp expression that comes to mind, instead of making the words give the picture exactly as fancy creates

B. *The Wrong Image*

4. *The Wrong Word or Figure*

Generally any one but the young author is able to detect such slips at once:

> The blood rushed to her cheeks as she *blanched* with shame. Their *sharp* glances fell on him like *hammer* blows.

5. *Irrelevant Image*

Here is the introduction to a fable about a mouse who served a bear because the big beast had once spared his life:

> The leaves were tumbling down, and winter was approaching. The Bear began to prepare things for his long nap. After all was in order, he went into a corner of his lair and lay down. As he began to doze off, a little Mouse came into his den, jumping and dancing playfully.

Why all this heavy machinery to get the bear to lie down, so that the mouse may disturb him? Does a bear stand up all the year, waiting for autumn? The season has nothing to do with the story. The introduction might better have been, simply:

> Once, while a Bear was about to doze off, a playful Mouse danced near his nose and disturbed him.

Do not "spar for wind." Eliminate everything that does not concern your action. Stevenson and De Maupassant are especially famous for the swiftness of economy.

6. *Words Too Weak for Vivid Imagery*

In each of the following instances compare the words in brackets with those immediately preceding:

> Mrs. Snake went [*glided*] to her husband's side and said [*whispered,* or *hissed*]: "The Farmer is in that bush ahead. I just saw one of his shoes [*the tip of his heavy boot*]."

His Majesty the Lion again left his home [*lair*] and went [*stalked*] among the Sheep. "What!" he cried [*roared*], "and do ye still dare to disobey [*defy*] me?"

7. *Hackneyed or Trite Expressions*

If you cannot say anything better about two trees than that "they stood like sentinels at the gateway," then don't bring them into the story at all. Fleecy clouds very often swim in a sky of liquid blue. In stories, far too often. Do not strain after novelties of expression; but do not wield the rubber stamp. How many times have you not read something quite like this:

Glorious weather prevailed. It was a wonderful day. The sun shone with a brilliancy akin to that of white heat. The river was quiet, its surface as smooth as a mirror, reflecting the dazzling rays of the orb of heaven.

If the writer cannot revise such a passage with fresher imagery, he had better say that the day was lovely, and go on to tell his tale.

C. *Undue Emphasis of the Image*

8. *Words Repeated Monotonously*

A *schoolmaster* and his *guide* were once traveling a path through an Indian jungle. Knowing that tigers were common there, the *schoolmaster* asked the *guide* what he should do if they met a tiger. The *guide* replied that, etc.

The familiar pest of repetition is to be met wherever unpracticed hands essay composition. In narrative the fault arises almost always from a real difficulty; one must keep a certain image in the reader's fancy constantly without riveting the word into his temper. Limited vocabulary hampers dreadfully; but aid may be had from that good old friend of all writers, Roget's *Thesaurus,* or from any standard collection of synonyms. When you come to

Chapter VIII, you will find an exercise that will train you out of this sort of monotony, if you are given to it.

9. *Images Unnecessarily Detailed*

Hand in hand with downright repetition there often goes a dwelling on minute detail that slows the pace of action in a manner most distracting.

Suddenly a rustle came from the grass. The frightened Lamb turned and saw two fiery eyes appear as the grass was slowly pushed aside. With eyes fixed on the little Lamb, a cunning Fox sneakingly emerged from the grass. With his body low and his bushy tail high, the crafty Fox crawled eagerly toward his victim. A wicked snarl came from the hungry beast, and a faint bleat from the terrified Lamb. The Lamb took a cautious step backward, but it was too late. The Fox was almost upon her. The sly Fox came forward, planting now one foot, then the other.

Fundamentally, the imagery is vivid. Yet the expression is burdened with repetitions, needless details, and supernumerary adjectives and adverbs, until there is a fantastic resemblance to the "slow moving picture." The whole labored business seems to be the result of overworry lest the reader fail to get the meaning, which is absurdly simple. When you find yourself writing in this forced fashion, either do the passage over again, or go through it and strike out at least two-thirds of the modifiers. Leave only the most picturesque.

One obvious resemblance of all these types of error is that they are inherent in the writer's *wording* of his imagery. This, after all, should not be surprising. Writing is a matter of words, though a great many people never realize it. Pictures are transferred from the mind of the author to that of the reader, not tele-

pathically, but by means of physical marks—symbols —on physical paper. If the wrong symbol is used, the public must do some of the writer's work in adjusting the discrepancy, or may even miss the meaning completely. Naturally, no one wishes to read such stuff any more than he cares to pick his way through an ill-spelled letter. How long would a telegraph operator remain in employment if he constantly confused the symbols of his code?

Exercises

A. *Narrative Style: The Image in Action*

For one of the following concrete nouns, and for one of the abstract, write one sentence containing an image of action for each of the seven senses listed in Section III of this chapter. If the terms listed below do not please you, use two of your own. Select your verbs carefully.

Concrete	*Abstract*
goat	frenzy
stowaway	dizziness
lizard	complacency
rain	contentment
tree	calm

Examples:

tree (kinæsthetic): The branches *were bowed* beneath their burden of pears.

complacency (olfactory): The Senator regarded the expectant audience with an imperceptible broadening of the nostrils, as if *to savor* the incense of acclaim.

Note: Preserve such loose sheets in the portfolio, together with the longer exercises.

B. *Narrative: Writing a Fable for a Given Moral*

On the basis of one of the following morals, or one of your own, write a fable or allegory of 200-300 words.

Vary your imagery to appeal to more than sight and hearing, but do not force your style. Select the verbs and the verbals carefully.

You may wish to emulate the ironic tone of George Ade's *Fables in Slang*—but don't imitate the slang. Experts like Ade or Ring Lardner can work wonders in this medium, but the efforts of beginners are generally quite dispiriting.

John Gay is a good model in English for those who would versify their fables.

Morals

Honesty is the best policy.
Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.
Handsome is as handsome does.
Everything has its use.
A penny saved is a penny earned.
Obscurity brings safety.
Faint heart never won fair lady.
Rumor hath wings.

Suggested Readings

Fables

Ade, George—*Fables in Slang.*
Gay, John—*Fables.*
La Fontaine—*Fables.*

Psychology

Turner, Egbert M. and Betts, George H.—*Laboratory Studies in Educational Psychology* (Appleton, 1924), Experiments 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 16.

Chapter IV

DIALOGUE

I

Model 4. *The Wolf and the Watch-Dog*

A famished Wolf once came face to face with a well-fed Watch-Dog who was taking an evening stroll through the woods.

"I suppose I should make an end of you in a moment," Rover remarked indulgently, after one glance of appraisal, "but I have eaten so well that I am inclined to be agreeable with any one."

" 'Eaten well!' " the poor Wolf echoed. "How long it is since I have been able to speak those words of myself! In fact, I am so starved that I can hardly move about."

"I can see that," the Dog sympathized. "It is too bad, for you could be as plump as I, were you to go about it as I do."

"Ah! And what would you advise?" the trembling Wolf demanded.

"Well, you could act as my assistant in keeping thieves off the grounds and out of the house."

"A bargain, and many thanks! Fortune has smiled at last! And it is high time I left this forest, with its cold, and its damp, and its hunger, and came in for my share of a cozy corner and some good meals."

"Why not?" agreed the Dog, good-naturedly. "Trot right along with me."

They had not gone far, however, before the Wolf noticed a queer scar on the Dog's neck.

"Please," he requested, "what is that mark?"
"What mark?"
"The one on your neck."
"Oh! Nothing of consequence."
"But, please—"
"Why—. The rubbing of the collar, I suppose!"
"Collar? Why must you wear a collar?"
"To hold the chain, silly!"
The Wolf stopped dead. "Chain! You are tied?"
"Of course. I'm rather strong, you know. And I've a pretty bad temper. They have to lock me up at dawn. But I'm free as the air after dark; and I'm petted and fed like a prince—. What are you doing? Aren't you coming along?"
"I should say not!" the Wolf laughed back, over his shoulder. "Keep your good food. As a wiser than I has put it, 'Rather freedom and a crust, than a groaning board and a chain!'"

We seem to hear this dialogue, or at least to overhear it. Hence the wolf and the dog are quite real. The images are made more vivid, partly because they are endowed with speech, and partly because we are being called upon to interpret for ourselves what is being said. When the wolf cries "Chain!" we imagine not merely the expression of amazement, but the feeling of consternation that sends it into his eyes. In addition to external imagery, therefore, speech gives us, as in everyday life, a key to the vast inner reality of thought and emotion, of the spirit that receives the message of sense and gives it forth again. In the above model, for instance, the story is not of two beasts strolling through a wood but of the internal impulses of one of

them, who could not gratify the yearning for comfort by sacrificing the need of freedom.

The dramatic quality of dialogue is mirrored in the form. Glance again at the model. The brief remarks, constantly alternated, break the black lines with variety for the eye, just as the interchange of meanings prevents the boredom of the mind. Such a tale is like a playlet with the stage directions in entertaining sentences, instead of bald notes.

If the action of images makes narrative a moving picture, the use of dialogue makes it a *talking* moving picture!

If a blind man and a deaf man were to go to the theater, the former would miss the moments of silent pantomime; the latter, all the explanations spoken without explanatory gesture. The real, the ultimate theater is not a building, with a stage and seats. It is the human fancy. The real audience is composed, not of people, but of their senses, their judgments, their emotions. At a performance of *Hamlet* the acute hearing of the sightless may enable them to visualize the story of the Dane mentally, as we ourselves do when our eyes translate the code of the printed page. But blind people do not go to the movies, or to pantomimes. The deaf man, for his part, can see Ophelia rave as well as we; but if the tragedy were broadcast over the radio, he would get nothing at all. In terms of narrative, there is just one sort of speech he could "hear"—the imagined utterances of characters in a book. These his eyes might pass on to his mental

hearing, making imaged sounds on the basis of quotation marks, very much as our eyes do for us.

II

The writing of dialogue is a delicate art. It is based, first of all, on close observation of the actual speech of persons, and the relation between what they say and what they mean. Frequently, too, what they do not say and do not mean! All the subtleties of personality must often be woven between the pegs of the quotation marks, without showing the threads too crudely.

Yet this is not all. It is but the beginning, not only of the art, but of the material. One must consider, along with the naturalness of the character's remarks, the pointedness as regards the trend of the action, and the vitality of the imagery put into the puppets' mouths. One might—and some people do—write reams and reams of speeches quite true to life but without the slightest spark of interest, or without once picking up the thread of a story. Franklin P. Adams and his contributors have often set forth in the "Conning Tower" of the New York *World* actual conversations overheard in the subway or on the buses. The dullness is incredible to the point of laughter. Play eavesdropper on a chat some time, and you will agree that a story employing such stuff for dialogue could hardly hold your attention.

The simple truth of the matter is that no form of composition can be haphazard. Only life itself can

be that, because life need not worry about its public. So the writer, as we saw in connection with fantasy in Chapter I, does not so much imitate or mirror life, as he does use the impressions gathered from it. These he combines in new ways, striking a balance between reality and his design, and aiming less at a record than at plausibility, which is always more pleasing.

In dialogue he works his ends by means of a few simple devices. He tries to make his persons speak in a manner which is representative, characteristic, rather than photographically exact. A good writer of dialect, for instance, like Irvin S. Cobb, does not transcribe speech phonetically, but merely intersperses everyday English with a few flavoring localisms. He does not let any figure in his story talk at length unless the matter is interesting for its imagistic content as well as its personal richness. Michael Arlen, to mention an entirely different sort of raconteur, generally makes the speeches short. Their brevity lends piquancy to the epigrammatic impertinence, the Georgian wit. It is a relief to the eye, after several pages of solid print, to come upon others broken with the lines and half-lines of rapid talk. The story moves faster.

There are, besides, certain tricks of varying the very wording of dialogue. These devices are of two general classes:

The first has to do with synonyms for the "he saids" and "she saids." One must find substitutes for the common verb of speech, or the recurrence will degenerate into colorless, maddening repetition. In Model 4

one may note the following instances of the avoidance of monotony:

"Why not?" *agreed* the Dog good-naturedly. "Trot right along with me."

"Ah! And what would you advise?" the trembling Wolf *demanded.*

"Well, you could act as my assistant in keeping thieves off the grounds and out of the house."

The Wolf stopped dead. "Chain! You are tied?"

The second trick has to do with the placing of the "he said" in relation to the actual quotation. Observe that in the first example above, the quoted words come before and after; in the second, before; in the last, after. In the third there is no "he said" at all; we know that it is the Dog speaking. In the fourth we have the name of the speaker, but not the verb of speech. This simple variation of position is only mechanical, but the effect of obviating monotony is as subtle, so far as the layman is concerned, as the refinements of characterization.

III

Now for the elementary but pesky matter of the punctuation:

A. Quotation Marks

1. Quotation marks are used only about the words of a speaker when these are reported directly and exactly.

Direct Discourse.—"Ah! And what would you advise?" the trembling Wolf demanded.

Indirect Discourse.—The trembling Wolf demanded what it was that the Dog would advise.

NOTE: The marks opening a quotation are written as one would write the number 66. Those closing, resemble 99.

2. When several sentences, all by one speaker, are quoted uninterruptedly, use quotation marks only before the first and after the last.

Then rose an old, very wise Rat, and said:
"Brethren, there is but one course to follow: Some one must bell the Cat. Then we shall hear her from afar, and have time to escape her clutches."

3. When several paragraphs, all by one speaker, are quoted, use the marks before each, but after the last only.

Vanderwater's reply was as brief as a summary:
"You people have the right of way. We admit that. We admit that we have no legal right to let down your bars and cross your fields to your spring.
"On the other hand, some one's poisoned our wells. Who it was, doesn't matter, at this moment. The wells are poisoned. And our wives and children are thirsty.
"That's why we've come armed, Clark. We'll sit and wait for a few minutes—five minutes. Meanwhile you can make up your mind."

4. Each time one speaker finishes, and the other or another begins, start a new paragraph.

"Please," he requested, "what is that mark?"
"What mark?"
"The one on your neck."

5. Single quotation marks ('—') are sometimes used to quote a word or other minor element of what some

one has said. (Some writers use the double marks for this purpose.)

He muttered something about being 'coerced' and hung his head.

6. The main use for the single marks is to indicate a quotation within another quotation. When the included one comes at the beginning or at the end of the greater, we have three marks; but the single and double are printed separately.

Note, from the final speech of the wolf in Model 4:

" . . . As a wiser than I has put it, 'Rather freedom and a crust, than a groaning board and a chain.' "

B. Incidental Punctuation

1. Quotation marks are almost always printed outside other marks.

"Ah! And what would you advise?" the trembling Wolf demanded.

2. An exception is made of punctuation which has no place within the quotation.

Did he say, "I won't"? (The inclusion of the question mark in the quotation would make "I won't" an interrogation.)

3. When the quotation comes before the "he said":
   (*a*) Punctuate a declarative or an imperative quotation with a comma.

"Please fetch that box," the old man requested.
"No. There are others," she replied.

(*b*) Interrogations and exclamations are punctuated as usual.

"Indeed!" cried the now furious dowager.
"Have you a moment's time?" asked Mr. Simpkins timidly.

(*c*) Note that in the above instances, the "he said" begins with a small letter.

4. When the quotation follows:
(*a*) Use a comma, generally, before it.

Miss Pearl looked him straight in the eye, and replied, "He took the road to the right."

(*b*) The colon may be used for this purpose when a stronger mark is required, as when the quotation is to be written as a new paragraph, or is taken from a book, or an oration.

Thus settled, he began his tale:
"Some years back, when I . . ." (A quotation of a great many paragraphs follows.)
It was Lincoln who said: "With malice toward none . . . etc."
Longfellow's message is: "Be a hero in the strife."

(*c*) Note that in all the above instances, the quotation begins with a capital.

5. When the "he said" breaks up a quotation:
(*a*) A single sentence so broken requires a comma at the point of interruption, and a comma after the "he said."

"No. You are too good," he insisted, "to be treated so."
"Well," she laughed, "that was the last of him!"

(*b*) Note that neither the second half of the quotation nor the "he said" is capitalized.

(*c*) When the "he said" comes between two sentences and belongs to the first:

"You are a fool," was the suave response. "You cannot get away with it."

or

"You are a fool!" was the, etc.

(*d*) When it belongs to the second:

"You are wrong." He waited a moment before adding, "John was not there at the time."

(*e*) When it is an independent sentence, belonging to neither:

"Oh, my God!" All the bravado was gone. "Please, please, don't send me to jail!"

These are the elements of the punctuation of quotations. Complete knowledge will come only with observation of the usage of great stylists and of printers reputed for correctness of form.

Exercises

A. *Narrative Style: Images and Action in Direct Discourse*

Using the words listed in Exercises A of Chapters I and III write five or six single speeches or bits of dialogue. Vary the form of disposition of the "he said." Appeal to as many of the senses as you can, in carefully chosen

nouns, and in verbs of action. Try to give some of the flavor of the speaker's personality.

EXAMPLES:

Illness (sight)

"He just lay there," she went on, "a mere skeleton, his face as white as the pillow-case."

Contentment (organic)

Gimpy wet his lips with the memory of those feasts. "Then we'd go out on the porch and sit and smoke. Or maybe," he added reflectively, "just sit."

"Too full to move?" the Boston Kid suggested.

"Oh, no. We could move, all right. On'y, there didn't seem no sense, movin'."

Horror (hearing)

"If you can imagine a rusty hinge that is witnessing a murder, you have a faint idea of that sound," he tried to explain.

B. *Narrative: A Fable in Dialogue*

On the basis of some moral and some central image, write a fable of about 300 words, almost entirely in dialogue.

The following is a freshman theme excellently suited to dialogue, and of remarkably ingenious imagery:

Fat in the Pan

The Cook threw some Fat into a Pan that was over the Fire, and left the kitchen. As soon as she was gone, said the Fat to the Pan:

"My dear madam, I am sure you did not know I was to visit you to-day, or you'd certainly have been a little cleaner."

"I am very sorry," the Pan responded, with a suspicion of warmth. "If I'm a little sooty, it's the Fire's fault, not mine, I assure you."

"Sorry! A lot of good that does me! How dare you be so dirty! Good clean Fat like me to have to associate with a grimy thing like you! The most important part of the meal to be subjected—insulted—Hussy! . . . Pfsss!"

And the Fat was gone.

"Poor thing!" said the Pan to the Stove. "It has gone its way like all those who, to maintain their dignity, fuss over trifles till their own heat carries them away!"

Suggested Readings

Baker, H. T.—*The Contemporary Short Story* (Heath, 1916), Chapters II and III.

Baldwin, C. S.—*Composition Oral and Written* (Longmans, 1922), Chapter VIII.

Clark, Glenn—*A Manual of the Short Story Art* (Macmillan, 1922), Part II, Chapter V.

Esenwein, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story* (Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, 1909), Part II, Chapter XII.

Grabo, Carl H.—*The Art of the Short Story* (Scribner, 1913), Chapter IX.

Note: The following writers are masters of dialogue: Michael Arlen, Fannie Hurst, Irvin S. Cobb, Mary E. Wilkins, Booth Tarkington, Carl Van Vechten, Willa Cather.

The drama offers opportunity to study literary representation of speech. See Shaw, Wilde, O'Neill, Pinero, Barrie, Jones.

Chapter V

AMPLIFYING THE MATERIALS: I, SENSE IMPRESSIONS

You should by this time have gathered a great many clippings in your portfolio. You should, moreover, have one good clipping for each of the following types of themes:

1. A powerful emotion
2. A trait of character
3. An unusual event or combination of events

You are now ready to work on the three you have chosen—not to write, as yet; but to prepare for writing; and especially to train your senses in that keen observation which is the foundation of the story-teller's genius.

Exercise

On a large sheet of paper, rule seven columns. Head these with the names of the senses listed in Chapter III, Section III.

Project yourself into the scene which the best of your clippings raises in your mind. As the separate images come to you, jot them down rapidly under the various headings.

Example:

The Night before the Funeral

Sight.—Mother on floor, cheek against coffin, dry eyes, deep rings, neat black hair

Hearing.—From next room, sniffing choking sounds, as of old woman
Touch.—Rough pine box, unpainted
Organic.—Lump in throat
Kinæsthetic.—Father pacing silently, jaw muscles working
Gustatory.—Younger child sleeping in high chair, lips and cheeks sticky with milk and potatoes from little dish
Smell.—Windows closed, air stagnant

You will probably find that the columns for sight and hearing fill more rapidly than the others. If so, it is only natural. Do not tear yourself away from these two; nor, on the other hand, force the other five. When you are finished noting the images that come of their own accord, one or two of the columns will be comparatively empty. Return mentally to the scene, and *look*—or perhaps *smell* or *feel* would be the better way to put it—for entries to fill the blanks. If possible, visit the actual scene of the clipping, or one like it,—or read a book about such places, people, events. Do not copy what another has written. Even in reading one may have original imagery, independent of the wording of the text, and possible of original expression.

The true student-artist will need no numerical requirement. If you wish some sort of standard, fifty should be the minimum, with no fewer than five in any column. When you get started, you will find these numbers rather easy to attain.

Before you re-write your list in final form, go through it and strike out every entry whose wording is stereotyped and trite. Simplicity and naturalness are great virtues; but a hackneyed style is as death itself. If you cannot restate the eliminated notes in fresher language, leave them out entirely.

Repeat the whole performance with the two other clippings, and fasten each list to the clipping that inspired it. On the back of the list you should, from time to time,

jot bits of dialogue or action that appeal to you as being both vivid and in point. No further writing is advisable for the present. The lists, like the clippings, will work in the subconscious. Later, when you come to write, the psychological process will have matured into something solid and rich enough to warrant composition.

In addition to listing images from clippings, try your hand at a similar task based on observations conducted at an accident, or in a crowded train, or at a wedding, or amid any circumstances that excite your attention. Be concrete. Be specific. Write the picture down exactly as it strikes your sense, your heart, your funny bone. You will be delighted to realize how much you can carry away from a situation, or dismayed by the weakness of certain of your sense organs. Train these, by hunting for their stimuli everywhere.

It is also time that you began to take brief notes of incidents of your experience, or of yarns and hard-luck stories told you by members of your family, by friends, by strangers you meet casually on ferryboats or elsewhere, by tramps, by policemen, and by members of the opposite sex. To the outlines of such little tales, add briefly your impressions of the opinions of the narrator, or of the character of one of his persons. And find room in your portfolio for every scrap you write.

All this takes time, effort, love—the magic ingredients of art, the three dimensions of progress. You will find the labor enjoyable. Work carries an infection with it, and brings rich reward.

Suggested Readings

The Training of Observation

Clark, Glenn—*A Manual of the Short Story Art* (Macmillan, 1922), Chapters III and IV.

Baldwin, C. S.—*Composition Oral and Written* (Longmans, 1922), Chapter II.

BALDWIN, C. S.—*College Composition* (Longmans, 1922), Chapter IV.

PHILLIPS, H. A.—*The Plot of the Short Story* (Stanhope–Dodge, 1912), Chapters XIV and XV.

NOTE: Read a story by one of the following writers, and study the freshness and variety of the sense appeal in some especially vivid paragraph: Conrad, Kipling, London, Thomas Burke, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Edna Ferber, Fannie Hurst.

Chapter VI

CONFLICT: ALTERNATIONS OF FORTUNE; SUSPENSE

I

MODEL 5. *The Crow and The Pitcher*

A Crow, dying amid a great drought, chanced upon a pitcher in which there was still a little water. "Saved!" he cried joyfully; but when he went to drink, he discovered that his beak was not long enough. Again and again he tried, to no avail. "Alas," he exclaimed, "I see that I am to perish, after all!" But suddenly an idea came to him: he picked up a stone and dropped it into the pitcher—and the water rose a little! With renewed hope he cast in all the pebbles he could find, and shells, and acorns. The water rose so high, finally, that he was able to plunge his beak in deep, and drink to his heart's content. "Still once again," he laughed, as he flew lightly away, "has Death been foiled by the taking of thought!"

MORAL: Persistence saves the day.

On the one hand we have the crow's thirst; on the other, the inanimate perversity of the deep pitcher and the shallow water. In addition to images and action we have here one of the most powerful engines of narrative—conflict.

There has been at least a trace of this in each of our models. The moon wished a cloak, but her mother had reason for denying her. The two crabs represent the universal struggle of the older and the younger

generations. The two travelers were confronted by a very fundamental, biological fight against a stronger but duller species of animal. The wolf balanced in his heart the opposing tugs of luxury and liberty, and made his decision along the very best lines of wolfish psychology. Now comes the crow, and overcomes an inertia in the physical universe by applying a principle of physics, much as John Stuart Mill has advised humans to do. Not merely in this handful of fables, but in all stories, short or long, is the element of conflict inherent and profound. It is obvious in Jack London. It is subtle in Henry James. But it is present everywhere.

Nor is the reason hard to find. Art is a close student of life, and life is universal struggle. Good is forever pitted against evil; energy against matter; life against death; thought against impulse. Nations go to war; friends to court, and families come to blows. Alas, even lovers quarrel—and the gods themselves darken the sunshine of Valhalla with the spears of their own twilight!

Such variations, however, are all in the externality of circumstance. Conflict itself, whatever the guise, is ever the same, and may be analyzed into five invariable parts, or steps. To begin with, we have a *need, appetite, impulse,* or *wish.* This takes external shape in an *object* or *goal.* Then into the arena steps an *interference,* or *obstacle.* There then arises the conflict proper, in the application of *force,* physical, mental, or both. Lastly, the *decision;* as in a prize fight, it

may be victory, defeat, compromise, or no-decision. Victory and defeat need no explanation. Compromise represents any result from which each contestant draws both loss and gain. No-decision—like the calling of a game on account of rain—means that a third player has stepped into the game and nullified the efforts of the original rivals. A simple instance in narrative is the fable of the two dogs who fought over the bone—while a third ran off with it. Writers of melodrama are fond of employing extraneous circumstance to avoid a decision. The hero, after beating up the fiend who has tied his beloved to the railroad track, rushes to the spot, only to learn that gypsies have kidnaped her. Meanwhile the villain has regained consciousness and malignity; so the battle is on again. A short tale has been lengthened; and there are more and more chapters of adventure, thrills, and romance.

In summary, here is a skeletal anatomy of conflict:

1. A need or desire (Force A)
2. Its object
3. An interference (Force B)
4. The conflict proper (Clash of the two forces)
5. The outcome
   (*a*) Victory (comedy)
   (*b*) Defeat (tragedy)
   (*c*) Compromise (realism)
   (*d*) No decision (continuity)

These are the bare bones. The fleshing of them is the business of imagery, action, dialogue. When one considers that conflicts arise everywhere, and that images

are uncountable, it is hardly surprising that the fund of original tales should appear inexhaustible.

II

Yet lazy writers can make a dull thing of a good scrap. Failing to exert ingenuity beyond the initial image, they repeat their meager material inanely, until the most rousing thing in nature sinks in dullness. The operation of a sewing machine is a domination of matter by mind; yet even if the thrill of this useful implement were not old-fashioned, one could derive but little excitement from a catalogue of stitches. It is from the novel alignment of forces, the constantly fresh rearrangement of struggle, and the alternations of fortune, that conflict derives its power to hold the mind.

Luckily, most of the devices of story-tellers, in this connection, are so old and well-known that they have been singled out and named, some of them since the days of the Greeks. They can therefore be distinguished and employed as readily as tools.

Devices for Maintaining Conflict

A. Variations of Imagery

1. *Development of Central Image*

Reserve powers natural to a character may be drawn upon at need. A hen does not do much flying, for example, but in a pinch she can flap herself up to the top of a kennel and cackle for aid. In the same way, such a state as bewilderment is often clarified by desperation; or assurance is ever ready to crumble. Make use of the latencies of your

original picture. Do not rest upon the first conception. Let it richen and ramify. One student, imitating Model 5, but with the central image of a cat and some milk, made the animal's motive, not her own thirst, but that of her kittens. Another good trick is to make the object of the struggle itself animate: Two wolves fight over a sheep, which runs off in the heat of the battle.

2. *Auxiliaries, Reinforcements, etc.*

While the wolves and the bears are fighting, some eagles swoop down to take one of the sides. A boy treed by a bull is saved by a dog, who either drives the enemy off, or summons aid. Inanimate objects, not at first greatly noted, but natural to a setting, come into play as need sharpens the wits: A cat, compelled to cross a stream, finds stepping-stones and a tree-trunk. The swaying of grass in the breeze reveals a hole into which a pursued chipmunk makes good his escape.

Memories, expressions of the face, and other psychological phenomena make good auxiliaries: A wavering look in an antagonist's eye causes one to seek and find the cause, and to take advantage of it. Again, father and son quarrel; a pout on the boy's face brings recollections of the dead mother and weakens the father's position at its strongest moment.

3. *The Steps of the Struggle: Action*

Instead of saying, "The Dogs and the Wolves had a great battle," plan and execute in some detail a real battle, with charges, retreats, sallies, rear-attacks, and what-not, so that some of the minor scuffles may appear to strengthen the chances of the side that ultimately loses.

4. *Verbal Struggle; Dialogue*

Nothing, of course, refreshes the interest or the eye of the reader so much as the appearance of dialogue's irregu-

lar outline on the printed page. Furthermore, an altercation is often of absorbing interest in itself. Almost any issue of a current magazine will provide instances of lovers quarreling, mothers pleading with children, husbands and wives debating a point, and merchants almost coming to blows over a deal. Note how much of your own everyday talk is an attempt to convince some one, or to argue him down.

B. Climax and Suspense

5. *The Culminating Moment*

It is abomination itself to stop a tale anywhere short of the outcome. Just why it should happen, no one knows; but amateurs, because they can visualize the result themselves, and are tired of writing so long, have the rankest way of omitting the end, or of scamping it. The excuse is that "the reader can figure it out for himself." Just as sensible as saying that because a portraitist has painted the body of his sitter excellently, the face may be imagined, and therefore, omitted! It is in the climax, as in the features of the subject, that the most careful representation is required.

True, some great artists can suggest, without bluntness, what they intend to convey. For the beginner, this is a perilous practice. He had better be downright, and in so many words.

Hold the *picture* of the climax in your senses from the very beginning, and don't rest till your words have carried it to the imagination of the reader. (The technique of climax is reserved for later chapters.)

6. *Alternations of Fortune*

In a student theme, a silly goose was made to ask several beasts a favor. All said, simply, "No." The variety of images was rendered monotonous by the similarity of result. The hyena should have turned it into a joke; the

bear might have become sullen; the chicken would perhaps compromise; the ant, giving its all, would yet not give enough.

When a fox tries to get a stupid wolf to do something for him, let the wolf scratch his head and enjoy one of those moments of illumination which occasionally reveal to the doltish their possible injury, if not the way or the necessity to escape it. There is no fun in a scrap that is one-sided all the way. Let the winner triumph only after some reverses. The line should be, not that of a smooth incline, but of a rising series of peaks, with gorges and chasms between.

7. *Episode before Outcome*

Often it is effective to seem to break off the narrative of conflict for a brief moment. But always return to it with heightened interest, faster tempo. The duelists, for example, may be forced to rest; but with the return of breath they taunt and then insult each other, until they are at it again, more furiously than before.

Such a seeming digression may be introduced at the point where reinforcements enter the scene, or where one of the contestants makes use of a surprise or an expedient that involves a touch of preparation. In Model 5, the clause: *But suddenly an idea came to him* serves the purpose of preparing the mind for the trick: *and he picked up a stone and dropped it into the pitcher.*

NOTE: The student theme appended to this chapter has an admirable episode before the climax. Look for it when you read the fable.

8. *Peripety, or Complete Reversal*

The crow of Model 5 goes from the extreme of thirst and death to that of gratification and salvation. Such a right-about-face in narrative is called peripety. Note that each extreme is plainly marked:

First extreme:

". . . I see that I am to perish, after all!"

Second extreme:

". . . Death [has] again been foiled by the taking of thought!"

This device doubles the possibility of lesser alternations of fortune. It requires clear statement of the first outcome before commencing the approach to the second, or opposite.

9. *Catastrophe, or Turning Point*

The hinge which unites the two results of 8 (above) is some event upon which the action of the conflict may turn up or down. In Model 5 the crow, threatened by death from thirst, nevertheless drinks and lives. The turning point is in the already-quoted sentence in which the happy thought of the first stone is related. When the turning point brings fall of fortune, as in tragedy, it is called catastrophe.

Exercises

A. *Narrative Style: Images in Conflict*

On the basis of three of the pairs in each of the following lists, write a group of sentences or a bit of dialogue containing a conflict. Vary your images and make them vivid. Select the verbs carefully for the precise shade of action. Avoid repetition.

Abstract	*Concrete*
temptation—training	frogs—boys
envy—innocence	snake—panther
pride—necessity	dog—chain
grief—youth	bird—cage
oppression—weakness	cat—rain
dignity—giggling	steer—lasso

EXAMPLES:

temptation—training

"Aw, come on in," Micky repeated, but without interrupting his practice of the side-stroke.

"I'll be late for school," was the none-too-stalwart response.

Micky indicated his disgust by taking a mouthful of water and blowing it out: "School!"

The seduction of this defiance was hard to resist. Yet to succumb meant to invite punishment from at least two agents of compulsory education. Poor Fred stood in the torment of indecision, etc.

cat—rain

The porch was as wet as the slammed door had proved inhospitable. Tabby tried the earth under the steps—a roaring stream. So, after a moment of crouched chaos, her bedraggled grayness streaked through the soaked grass to try what luck there might be under the eaves of the wood-shed. Etc.

B. *Narrative*

On the basis of any moral you know or can invent, write a fable of 300 words to exemplify the devices of conflict in original imagery.

See what another student has done:

The Fox and the Rabbit

An old Rabbit, who was sunning himself, suddenly heard an ominous crackle from the bush behind him. He was up and away in a flash, but with a sinking heart soon realized that he was being pursued. And a backward glance showed a fine young Fox terribly close.

On sped the Rabbit, exerting every ounce of his fear. For a moment, indeed, it began to seem that he might get away; but the next turn brought him right to the edge of a deep stream. It was not wide, but, he discovered to his desperation, too wide to be leaped; and the only object he might have

used for a stepping-stone was a flat, slippery rock at the edge of the nearer bank. He knew that he was trapped, so in despair he turned about to face his fate.

The Fox sat panting but unhurried on his haunches, enjoying the situation immensely.

"You were going to get away from me, weren't you?" he sneered. "What did you think you had after you, an old hen? Soon as I get my breath, I'll show you that my teeth are as sharp as my legs are swift. Sit down and make yourself comfortable for a moment. I'm in no hurry. You won't get away from me."

The poor victim said nothing. Yet he was a sage old fellow, and somehow the youngster's boastfulness made him feel that he might still escape. With the corner of his eye he sought aid everywhere.

Then something miraculous *did* happen. The rock slid gently away from the bank, and swam slowly toward the other side! A tortoise!

He was almost sick with hope and dread. One glance at his captor revealed that the braggart was too puffed with victory to notice that broad back out in the stream there. Struggling to master his trembling, the Rabbit began to feel his way toward escape by pretending to surrender.

"Yes," he said in a tone of bitterness, "you've got me, young man. I face doom. All that I ask is a moment to say my last prayers, if your breeding is such as to permit me."

"I'll have you understand," snapped the other, "that Foxes are not so ill-bred as you farm-yard churls suppose." Then, with a twinkle, he added: "Say your prayers, old fool—while I say a little grace before meat." Suiting action to words, the fine fellow even pretended to bow reverently.

This was more than the captive had dared hope. In a bound he was on the back of the amazed swimmer before the latter could duck. In another, he was across!—and in a third he was out of sight altogether.

"Gone!" gasped the Fox.

"Well," declared a matronly Owl, who had heard the whole affair from her safe perch, "I may be blind, but I have sense enough to see that a person may be *too* clever!"

CONFLICT

Suggested Readings

Uzzell, Thomas H.—*Narrative Technique,* Part II, Chapter IV.

Note: Any one of the following tales will provide abundant instances of the devices of conflict: "A Scent of Roses," M. E. Wilkins; *Ivanhoe,* Scott; *Treasure Island,* Stevenson; *The Call of the Wild,* London; "The Gay Old Dog," Ferber; "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," Harte.

Chapter VII

STRUCTURE

I

In Model 2, you will recall, the image of the Crab's crooked movement was employed to teach the moral *Practice what you preach.* This lesson is the Point of the fable. It is whatever the story is driving at. Throughout the remainder of our exercises we shall use the word Point as though it were a technical term. Its meaning is simple. The Point of a tale is that which the writer wishes to convey.

Sometimes, as in the case of our fables, it is a preachment, a doctrine, a guide to conduct. Sometimes it is a sugar-coated exposition. For example, an account of how Mr. Smith caught the burglar might fulfill the function of an explanation of such heroism generally. Folk tales, like the one about the boy who stopped the leak in the dyke with his finger, abound in such practical counsel. Again, a Point may be some great emotion, or a trait of character. If you were to tell what you did when the mad dog chased you, you would be giving a good picture of fear in the urge toward survival. Or if you were to relate an anecdote to indicate the miserliness of some one you know, you would be using narrative to reveal an element of personality. Finally, the Point may lie simply in the

nature of the action. Many a story that is considered a good yarn "without any purpose" has the definite purpose of relating incidents humorous, tragic, or just wonderful (as in a dream) which carry an interest all their own.[1]

All the imagery of a narrative, all the action, the dialogue, the conflict, are based on the Point. It therefore merits close analysis and thorough understanding.

II

MODEL 6. *The Boy and the Nettle*

A Boy who was stung by a Nettle ran home and told his mother: "I just touched it, and it stung me!"

"The reason it stung you," the mother replied, "was that you just touched it. Had you grasped it firmly, it would not have hurt you at all."

MORAL: Half measures are worse than none.

The Point is not merely *stated* in the moral, but *pictured* in the admonition, "Had you grasped it firmly, it would not have hurt you at all."

Observe that this image-translation of the Point is placed in *the very closing words of the story.*

The ending is thus made to round out the narrative by emphasizing the theme.

Every well written narrative ends this way. Sometimes the writer sums up his aim in a conclusion containing the very abstract term which, consciously or

[1] For further explanation of the action as the Point, see Chapter XIV, Section I.

unconsciously, has guided his fantasy through the pattern of images. Sometimes, though he makes no point-blank conclusion of this sort, he terminates in an image worded so emphatically, or so suggestively, that the reader takes the strong hint, and forms the proper conclusion for himself. This is precisely what happens when you sit back to reflect upon a story—or when your little brother, fresh from the autobiography of Jack Dempsey, darts about the attic swinging uppercuts on imaginary opponents.

A musical composition in the major always ends upon "do" of the key in which it begins. This is called the "tonic," or dominant, because it gives the tone of all the other notes, because it dominates the composition. So, in narrative composition (or in any other, for that matter, which is constructed well) the Point is at the end. This is not merely strategic, but logical. If you stop before you have said what you had to say, you haven't said it; and if you run on beyond the saying of it, you are either repeating, or saying something else. In brief, the sensible rule would seem to be: State your Point—and stop.

Examine any tale that you consider to be of good workmanship, and you will find the foregoing invariably true. Our own models are instances. Even Model 1, which looks to be all Point, closes with the mother moon's reason for not giving her daughter a cloak; and we infer the moral that life is too variable to be clothed in any one theory, or that a jack-of-all-trades is master of none. The meaning of the young

crab's conclusive taunt we have already seen. The traveler closed the story as well as the companionship with his caustic comment on fair-weather friends. Likewise the wolf, in parting company with the dog. As for the crow and the pitcher, a simple re-reading of the ending should suffice: "Still once again has Death been foiled by the taking of thought!"

If a circus performer were to ride down an incline on a bicycle, loop the loop once or twice, and then look for a place to land, you can imagine where he would land. He would land in a chaos merited not merely by his sins, but by his stupidity.

It is not enough to know where you are going to stop. You must know where you are going to stop before you start. If you crave excitement, accost a policeman some day, and say: "I am not headed anywhere. Will you please direct me?" No matter how he takes this, stick to your story. The results will amaze you.

Naturally, every story, even an unfinished story, *ends*. The words—the writing, the print, the sounds—come to a stop. It is where and how they stop that counts.

That's the Point.

III

Model 7. *The Mole and Her Mother*

A young Mole, quite as blind as any of her kin, once bragged that she could see.

Her mother, offended by such conceit, put a lump of

camphor directly before her eyes, and ordered her to tell what it was.

The young one, without a moment's hesitancy, replied: "A stone."

"It is quite evident," the mother laughingly exclaimed, "that you not merely have no sight, but no sense of smell, either!"

MORAL: In concealing one defect, you may disclose another.

Again, the Point is brought home by an emphatic image at the end.

Note, further, that since the conclusion is to be stated in the words of the mother, she must have occasion to speak as she does. Her opportunity is the daughter's double failure, which is the outcome of the test, which in turn is the result of the boast. Each step is seen, therefore, to hinge upon the one preceding, *working backward from the Point.*

A moment's consideration will serve to show that analysis of structure, so far as narrative is concerned, is necessarily a process backward. In the first place, we must start from the Point, the source and basis of the step before, and the one before that, and so on. An analogy might be made here with the root of a plant—the last thing we observe when we approach, the first when we study. In the second place, since analysis is a process of breaking down a whole into its parts methodically, we should remove first what was put on last, as we do when we try to learn how a clock ticks.

The method is emphasized here because it can play

an important part in plot *construction.* The writer who starts forth gayly with no idea of whither, may, possibly, get somewhere. More often, he does not. He has not provided that indispensable element of his material—the ending. Furthermore, since he is not sure of his direction, he may "spar for wind" at the outset, and thus waste time and words in a tedious, irrelevant introduction. Lastly, should he attempt to force a conclusion simply because he needs one, he will doubtless leave his story with a badly constructed middle, inconsistent in spots, superfluous in others, and in others merely gaping with omission.

The man who plans his story from the rear end need not worry about that end at all, for he has it to start with. Similarly, the middle has more chance to be consistent, complete, economical, since he knows, at any step, the final step toward which he is *proceeding.* Finally, he can gauge his introduction with an assurance that there will be no waste within it, and no awkward break between it and the line of the story proper, leading to the Point. Once he has written a rearward plan, moreover, there is nothing to prevent his testing and correcting it by planning forward.

There are doubtless many writers and critics who would throw up their hands in horror at this counsel, objecting on the score of the "deadening of the inspiration, the extinction of the spark." Certainly, the genius may need no such régime. Nor may the average professional, after he has learned his craft. But it is a simple fact that amateurs have not only not lost, but

decidedly gained, in inspiration, in measure as they have mastered the device of analysis backward. They have, furthermore, developed a previously unobservable power to write with a sound sense of structure. Which, it is humbly suggested, is just what amateurs need and wish to learn.

Another word or two, concerning, specifically, the introduction. It has been demonstrated in class, again and again, that the man who planned his fable backward had no trouble in determining where he must start it. Somehow, he knew. Yet, to test his result, he had a guiding principle more reliable than intuition; namely, *the beginning of a story is that step in its progress which leads to the Point without lack or waste of succeeding steps.*

In a nutshell, the function of the Point in narrative is not merely to give rise to the images, but to dominate the structure by

1. Fixing the conclusion;
2. Dictating the steps leading to the conclusion;
3. Determining the introduction.

IV

Regardless of how the spirit of a great narrator guides him in the creation of a masterpiece, two simple truths are manifest: first, that analysis of the masterpiece reveals a skeletal structure; and second, that that sort of structure may be reproduced, not mechanically, but *consciously,* by regulated processes of thought.

Now—thought is something else again.

At any rate, we have not yet referred to it in these exercises; and since it is a complicated if not a rare business to think, perhaps we may as well pay some attention to it at this juncture, when we are threatened with a need of it in our work.

Thought, according to John Dewey [2] and other clear thinkers, may be regarded in four different ways:

1. Anything that "pops into the mind" when the object itself is not present. More likely than not, this "anything" is an image. When some one asks you, "What are you thinking of?" and you answer, "Oh, of John," you are most probably just picturing the absent John. This sort of "thought," as you already know, is the rough material of narrative.

2. A reverie, or daydream, or fantasy. When you lie on a couch, tapping the wall and "musing" on the remembered images of last week's tennis, or replaying the match in such fashion as to soothe your ego, or letting a fable "form itself in your mind," you are thinking in a more connected way than if you merely let disconnected images drift into and out of consciousness. (Now you know how you have composed the exercises in this series!)

3. Belief. We sometimes say, "I think," when it would be precise to say, "I believe." If a stranger asks you which of two crossroads leads to Derbytown, and you reply, "I *think* the one to the right," you are not thinking in any accurate sense at all. The same is true of many a brave fellow who plunges into the writing of a story quite sure that he has "the ending all thought out." He has simply a rosy glow, with perhaps some beams of imagery in it;

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2 John Dewey, *How We Think* (Heath, 1910), Chapter I.

but that is not thought. It is a mere trust which, like his belief in himself, is likely to come to grief.

4. Reason. If, before you answered the man at the crossroads, you had paused to determine the probable direction in which Derbytown lay, its location as regards surrounding woods, streams, or hills; and if you had drawn upon every reserve of experience and knowledge to fix this accurately; and if you had checked your conclusion by consulting passers-by and signposts—then you would have been *thinking*.

The components of creative reason, as employed by scientists to determine truth beyond the liability of error Dewey states to be these:

(*a*) A doubt. Uncertainty at crossroads.
(*b*) An end. Derbytown—where is it?
(*c*) The invoking of all past experience to guide the choice.
(*d*) The elimination of certain possibilities by trial; and by trial, the selection of others.
(*e*) The testing and re-testing of one's trial conclusion till it is accurate.

At this stage, the student may well ask: "What has this to do with me? How shall I go about it, for example, to reason out the structure of a fable?"

V

There must, to begin with, be a Point. Let us select one at random: Experience is the best teacher.

The next ingredient is the central image. We determine the type of this from the Point; that is, in our case, the name of some beast or thing eminently suited to the idea of learning, not by clever forethought, like the Fox, but from blunders. The connotation of child-

hood, as the period associated with any sort of learning, would influence us toward the selection of one of the young of some species. What shall it be?—a stupid gosling? a headstrong colt? a silly chick? a playful lamb?

Suppose we select the colt. It is now necessary to provide an action characteristic of the horse, and suitable or adaptable to the Point. Such a combination might be any of the following: eating—too much; running—where the wolves prowl; kicking—a hot-tempered farmer. The one about the wolves seems to offer good contrast in imagery. So be it.

Now for a plan. Since we are making the outline backward, let us try, not to write, but to sketch the final sentence. Of course it must be something to the effect that the colt has learned his lesson once for all. We do not wish to put it so baldly, however. Perhaps the colt, or another animal, will say something to the effect that it is poor profit to pay for anything twice; or that one advantage of travel is the appreciation of home; or that. . . . But the second one will do; it suggests the whole of the last little scene, and some of the beginning—the young colt finds the farm dull, and runs away to the romantic—.

But we are running away from the immediate business of getting the Point-Action, or Point-Image expressed in a trial Point-Sentence. So we take a sheet of paper, and at the bottom (since we are working backward) we set down the moral we started with:

Experience is the best teacher.

A bit above that we write some such Point-Sentence as:

"Oh, yes," ruminated old Bossy from the next stall, "they do say that the best thing you learn from travel is to appreciate your own home."

Why does she say that? Has the prodigal given thanks for the comfort and the safety of the old barn? Then, a bit above the Point-Sentence (you may find, upon revising, that you need to insert an omitted image) make the jotting:

Prodigal grateful for comfort and safety of old barn.

What makes him speak in this strain?—the envious admiration of another young horse? Then add that, too. Do likewise with all the preceding steps: the scolding of the wanderer by his mother, his dash into the yard just as the farmer shoots the wolf; the terrors of the chase; the wolf and the horse see each other from a distance; the horse gains the peak after a gay gallop up the hill; the leap over the lowered bars; the advice of elders about wild enemies; the urge to scale the heights; the colt impatient with the dull pasture.

You now have these events, not only in the order you have set them down but, reading from top to bottom, in the order of the story as it will later be written. In the spaces, you may, and should, write such bits as the following:

His joy, and his wanderings, too, for that matter, were cut off the very next instant; for straight ahead of him,

though at a distance, he beheld the gleaming eyes, the white teeth, the red, hungry tongue of a creature he somehow knew at once for a Timber Wolf. . . .

The Wolf was not fated to reach his throat. A shot rang out, the beast whirled and fell gasping, etc. . . .

"My!" whinnied his cousin Roan enviously. "I'll bet you had a great time, though; didn't you, Rob?" . . .

Perhaps you will use these jottings. Perhaps not. They are like the little pencil sketches before the painting, or the tuning up before the performance. They "get your hand in."

If, even after you have your outline, you still hesitate to write a rough draft of your fable, you can make your notes over into a brief synopsis. Or perhaps you may wish to combine synopsis and rough draft, like this:

The Prodigal Colt

A young Colt yearned to leave the flat lands of his native pasture, and to climb a neighboring peak. "There are Wolves and other wild beasts in those timber lands," his father chided, "so you shall just remain where you are." But the young limbs were eager for the heights which the sun gilded; so one day, while the bars were down for a moment, and no one saw, he leaped out and away! How glorious to be one's own master! On he went, nor did he slack his pace when the up-grade brought him to the edge of some woods that were very dark indeed. "What of a little shadow?" he neighed gayly to himself. "That's part of the uphill fight! I am young and strong! Soon I shall be at the top, high as the Sun himself!" But his joy and his wanderings alike were cut short the very next moment; for he saw a hungry Timber Wolf staring eagerly at him.

At first he (NOTE: I should have called him Rob in the introduction.) did not know what to do, but soon the Wolf decided for him by bounding in his direction. With a scream of terror Rob turned and fled, his fright lending him wings down the swift incline. Indeed, when he reached the level again, he was willing to believe that he had escaped; but a rearward glance sent him flying on, for the Wolf had cut the distance in two. Soon, in spite of the thunder of his own hoofs, he could hear the terrifying patter closing in behind; and, almost at his own gate, he saw the gray mass shoot up beside him and spring for his throat. At that instant, however, a shot rang out, the Wolf fell writhing to the ground, and Rob cleared the gate with what seemed his last gasp. That night he received the scoldings of his still excited mother with a better grace than usual. Indeed, when his cousin Roan ventured to whinny that, after all, Rob had had a great time of it, the latter did not hesitate to contradict. "I have had my share of golden peaks," he cried. "Give me this cozy straw, with the barn-door barred."

"Yes," ruminated old Bossy from the next stall, "they do say that one of the best things you learn from travel is to appreciate your own home."

MORAL: Experience is the best teacher.

Now all that remains is to break this mass up into paragraphs, supply more dialogue for variety and realism, and improve such trifles as the immediate realization of the colt that the strange wild creature was a timber wolf. Then everything is ready for the final draft.

The present writer offers his simple word that the above fable, such as it is, and this whole section of the chapter, were written in a single session, purposely

without revision, and without any more preparation than is indicated in the text. He would add that his students have often accomplished far, far better results, and by the same conscious process herein outlined.

So may any one, if he will.

Exercises

A. *Narrative Style*

On the basis of three Morals of your own selection, conjure up central images and representative actions; and write Point-Sentences, preferably in dialogue form.

B. *Narrative*

1. For one of the above-described Point-Sentences, plan a fable backward.

Check carefully for consistency, elimination of waste, and addition of matter omitted. Write a brief synopsis, or fuller rough draft. Revise the draft.

2. Write the fable in full, enriching (but not clogging) it with varied imagery, well-chosen verbs, and pointed dialogue.

C. *Analysis*

Read some great story, such as Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher." Determine the Point. Write an outline backward.

Suggested Readings

Baker, H. T.—*The Contemporary Short Story,* Chapter III.
Clark, Glenn—*A Manual of the Short Story Art,* Part I.
Phillips, H. A.—*The Plot of the Short Story,* Chapters VII, X and XVI.

Chapter VIII

AMPLIFYING THE MATERIALS: II, SYNONYMS

THE wide-awake student has already taken unto himself one hint of the last chapter as regards the matter in his portfolio. What he has collected is material for narrative scenes. Since every narrative must be founded on some guidance to have a meaning, the clippings and the lists of images must in each case be focused upon a Point.

This, as was also suggested in the last chapter, may be any of a variety of things—a preachment, an emotion, a trait, a mood or atmosphere, an explanation, or the sheer quality of the action itself. In the case of our three clippings, we have arbitrarily selected emotion, trait, and quality of action. Indeed, we were controlled in our search for the clippings by these three aims. The Points are therefore at hand, requiring only to be transformed into Point-Sentences to establish the conclusions of the scenes.

What this means may be more solidly grasped if one examines several actual clippings.

Here is a paragraph from the story of an automobile accident:

When they saw the taxicab coming toward them, they attempted to get out of the way, according to passers-by. Margaret screamed, and her brother tried to drag her from

the path of the skidding machine. Before he could accomplish his object, *the automobile struck the pair and knocked them down.*

The italicized portion of the last sentence sums up the nature of the events. This Point—*automobile accident*—is foreshadowed by the first sentence, and prepared for by the second. Note that even in a news-story, which is narrative as surely as is a fable, a novel, or an outline of history, there must be some Point for meaning and coherence. If the reporter does a good job, the Point will be found in the last sentence, either expressed in so many words, or presented in the form of sufficiently suggestive images. In tales of action, such as that summarized in the above selection, the events culminate in the Point-Sentence as each stride uphill would take you to the top. Such a progression, especially if one is relating real happenings, writes itself without monotony; for each step is different enough from the others to provide contrast, and therefore vivid imagery.

Such, however, is not the case when the writer is attempting, not so much to express a sequence of action, as to create within the consciousness of the reader some state of feeling. The following badly written piece aims only too obviously at making one feel sympathy for the frozen:

The three men had suffered severely from *exposure,* and Thompson's feet had been *frozen.* They told officers that they were fishing when their launch became disabled and floated out to sea. The three men said that they had but

a gallon of water when their boat developed trouble. This soon *froze* and the only drinking water available was what could be drawn from the engine of the boat. This, too, *froze* and they were without food or water.

When the *Plymouth* sighted the helpless launch at dusk Sunday, blankets that had been converted into improvised sails were *frozen* stiff. It was *snowing* and *sleeting* and the waves were breaking over the little boat. The clothing of the three men in the launch was *frozen* and they were nearly dead from *exposure.*

Of course, even here the Point is stated in the final sentence and foreshadowed in the first, and emphasized throughout; but the primitive procedure of merely repeating *exposure* and *frozen,* with only *snowing* and *sleeting* for variants, leaves all the credit for interest in the occurrence, and gives none to the writing. The same scene, in the hands of Joseph Conrad, would tear at the vitals with the manipulated details of agony. The reporter's job, it is true, is to "report the facts." It is when he tries to reach the imagination, however, that the feebleness of his haste and his iterations reveals the gap between narrative as a trade and narrative as an art.

How is it possible to avoid the deadening grip of repetition when one wishes to reproduce a trait or a mood by means of narration? In the first place, the Point must be determined. When, as in the present case, it is contained in the word *exposure* or the word *frozen,* every effort should be made to draw upon all the senses for images of such actions of cold upon man as produce suffering and arouse pity. The cutting

wind cracks the skin raw, and stabs to the bone. The icy gray water swells about the craft, breaking against it with a spray of fine torture. Clothing is soaked; it stiffens and congeals to the flesh, so that every bend or twist is physical pain. In defense, the men blow upon their hands, rub their knees and calves, move their toes uselessly and without sensation inside the hard shoes. The touch of rope, wood, or metal sends the numbed hands under coats and shirts, and into armpits not warm enough to re-animate dead finger bones. At last, too chilled to hope, they merely sit huddled and helpless in the lap of the triumphant cold. The multiplication of these details requires sympathetic imagination; but it requires words, too; and for the ordinary vocabulary, the strain is too great, especially when time is limited by an eagerness to forge ahead. One had better resort to external aids; and in this connection there is no expedient better than Roget's *Thesaurus.*

Let us see how this procedure would work out with a much different clipping, one that concerns a fire at night. You wish, perhaps, to present a sense of *bewilderment.* Turn to the index at the back of the *Thesaurus,* look up *bewilderment,* and when you find the section containing the list of synonyms, *copy them all down on paper.* It is not enough to read them. Write them. You will thus fix the more familiar terms in memory. You will tend, not to overlook the unfamiliar, but to acquaint yourself with precise meanings, with the aid of a good dictionary. Write down, likewise, some of the antonyms in the adjacent

column. These are words opposed in meaning to *bewilderment*—words like *assurance* and *confidence,* which may contribute a heightening of contrast by setting the conduct of the people in the house against that of the firemen.

The *Thesaurus* groups synonyms according to the part of speech: first nouns, then verbs, and so on. You, as a narrator, should copy the verbs first. They pump the life-blood of the story. Ponder over them. Compare them for the precise shade of discrimination. Above all, let them stimulate you to visualize snatches of "business" for your scene.

Here is an example: One of the substitutes for *bewilder* is *puzzle.* Applying this to your central image of fire at night, you may get something like the following:

She would not lay the mattress down upon the wet pavement. She was exhausted from the noisy, smoky descent, and could not hold the thing in her arms much longer. So she simply stood there, nightgowned and barefoot, with her breath gone and her hair in her eyes, staring dully at the firemen who passed the hose about her and muttered things under their breaths.

Observe that, since we have made the woman *look* puzzled, we need not use the word *puzzled* itself.

The advantage of gathering synonyms, precisely as in the case of the clippings or the images, is to fertilize the imagination and thus to prepare a fund of stuff so great that you can select the best and reject the rest. By the time you come to write, this process will largely

have taken care of itself. The subconscious does the eliminating and the choosing; and you find yourself composing with great fluency, and with little risk of losing the train of thought while groping for a word that will not come.

Of course, when you have learned how to use the *Thesaurus,* you will be able to select, merely from reading, the words you believe you will need. In the first few attempts, however, copy everything—even the Latin quotations at the end!

Exercises

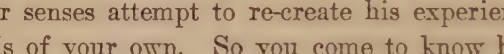
1. Determine the Point-Word of each of your three clippings. (Discussion will help greatly.)
2. Write the three lists of synonyms and antonyms, and attach them to the clippings. On the back of each list, sketch snatches of action and dialogue, suggested by individual words, and developing your central image.

Chapter IX

THE ELEMENT OF TIME IN STRUCTURE

I

The business of becoming acquainted with a man consists not merely of studying his appearance and opinions, but of hearing him relate his past life, his plans for the future. As he speaks of these events, bygone or anticipated, your imagination follows him, your senses attempt to re-create his experience on the basis of your own. So you come to know him better. We might represent the situation graphically as follows:



The past contributes to the present, out of which the future grows. Or, if we call each of these one dimension, then, when we possess all three, we have "solid" idea of our man.

In a narrative of any length we have much the same situation. Sophocles' great drama of *Œdipus Rex* opens with the king's address to the populace on the occasion of a terrible plague. As he discusses the causes of the visitation with his subjects, there are brought into mention events antedating his coronation,

his coming to Thebes, and his very birth! Likewise, reference is made to the imminent return of a messenger sent to consult the oracle. In other words, while we are looking at and listening to the speakers, we are giving our senses equally to the visualization of their histories and their hopes.

One might therefore stretch a point, and call these three directions of thought the three dimensions of narrative action.

II

Model 8a. *The Lion and the Mouse*

Once upon a time, while a Lion was asleep in a shadowy spot, a Mouse, not seeing, ran over his nose and woke him. The Lion was quick enough to catch the poor little thing with his paw, and was about to kill him, but the Mouse so pitifully begged him to spare an insignificant creature who had unintentionally offended, that the Lion, with a smile, let him go.

Some weeks later, while the Lion was hunting through the woods for his prey, he fell into a trap, and roared so frightfully that every leaf in the forest trembled. The Mouse, in hope of assisting his former benefactor, ran to the net and began to nibble on the cords. It was not long before he had not merely accomplished his purpose, but set at liberty the very monarch of the woods.

The two paragraphs present a series of events in their chronological order, so grouped as to form two scenes. The gulf of separation, bridged by the phrase *Some weeks later* is an interval of time in which there occurred events not bearing on the Point. Although

the halves of the action are connected, they offer separate images, and the continuity is broken.

The breach may be eliminated by revising the fable as follows:

MODEL 8B. *The Lion and the Mouse*

A Lion, caught in the toils, set up a roar that filled the forest. All the other beasts fled from the terrifying sound, except one Mouse, who ran boldly up to the net, and set to work nibbling.

So amazed was the Lion, that he ceased roaring, and merely stared at his tiny champion. "How now, Mousey," he exclaimed, between amazement and amusement, "and are you so sure that I am not going to eat you the moment I am loose?"

"Quite sure!" The Mouse paused in his work with a smile that bared his sharp little teeth. "I see that you have forgotten, but it isn't so long since you rendered me a like service."

"The deuce I did!"

"I ran over your nose, one day, while you were sleeping, and woke you. But I begged hard to be let go, and you were kind enough to spare me.—Aha, so you remember, now!—But there is no time to waste."

The Lion delightedly watched the rope part in shreds under the rapid gnawing; and when he had shaken his bonds from him, and once more stood at liberty: "See!" he chuckled. "I spared your life because you were not worth my effort; yet you are powerful enough to liberate the very monarch of the woods!"

The Point, the images, the action are the same in both versions. The difference is that in 8A the events are related in chronological order; whereas in 8B we

begin with the last scene, and introduce the first by means of the speech of a character,—a method technically known as reported action. At any rate, the breach is gone. Of two possible introductions (there might, of course, have been more) we started the action at that one which was nearest the Point. The result is unity.

The principle involved is an *inversion* of action according to time.

The Model itself (8A) we may call a *Simple Chronicle.*

The revised version (8B) we shall call an *Inverted Chronicle.*

An Inverted Chronicle, like a complex sentence, achieves unity by subordinating minor elements to the one Point.

III

The great difficulty in inverting is to make reference to past or future with simple naturalness, without forcing. Especially true is this when the inverted scene is presented in dialogue. Perhaps it will be sufficient, as a demonstration of how amateurishness is to be overcome, to contrast these two treatments of a theme:

First Version

As Baldy bent over, a miniature of a sweet little child, a girl of perhaps a dozen summers, fell from his pocket. He picked it up hastily, as though to hide it from Red, but instead launched upon the following tale:

"Red, you are the involuntary observer of what I would have kept secret from any man. But you saved my life this afternoon, so I will tell you all: Many years ago I was a prosperous farmer in Pennsylvania. I was married—do not look surprised—and had one child who was stolen from me—"

"—by the Gypsies," Red helped him.

"Yes, Red, you are right—by the Gypsies. From that day to this I have been a wanderer of the highways and the byways, a rover, a hobo. But I will find her yet, Red. I will find her yet!"

Second Version

As Baldy bent over the pot, something fell out of his rags somewhere, and bounded off a stone with a sharp metallic "tick." Before he could snatch it back again, Red could not help seeing that it was the photograph of a little girl, set in an oval gilt frame.

"Yah," snarled Baldy. "Spyin'!"

The other bent his gaze upon the can he was opening, for a full moment, before replying. "Sure. I was spyin'. An' when I beat the dogs offa you yesterday,—that was spyin' too, I suppose. Kin I help seein' what I see?"

His day-old pal stared at him with an uneasiness that was fading suspicion at first, and then vagueness, and then the dawning of a confidence.

"My little gal," he said lamely, and looked again at the miniature.

"Yer coffee's boilin'," suggested the Red one, delicately.

"It ain't. I *want* to tell ya. 'Tain't no such a big secret, nohow. The Gypsies got her."

"Farmin' man?"

"Pennsylvania."

Silence, and a bubbling pot.

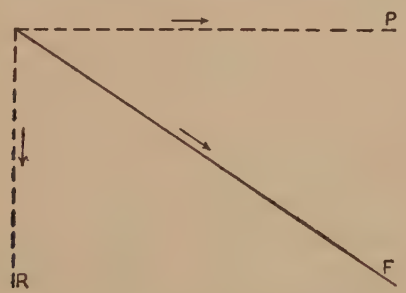
"I'll find her yet, Red."

"Will you?" The question was asked soothingly, as one humors an unhappy child. "Now think of that!"

The trouble with the first version is the obvious effort to force a Point without regard to probability. In Chapter IV, Section III, we had an instance of the other extreme—stenographic naturalism, without regard to any Point or story. Either effort falls far short of art. You will recall that in Chapter I we saw how fantasy ever strikes a compromise with life, drawing from facts, but altering the combination.

Do you remember the illustration in physics about a bullet shot straight out from the mouth of a gun? It tends to travel straight on, but gravity pulls it straight down; and the resultant path of the bullet is a curved line, something like the diagonal of a rectangle.

In narrative a similar situation obtains:



R is Reality. P is the Point. F is the line of plausibility that Fantasy really follows.

In inversion, or in any narrative procedure, do

your best to preserve this balance. Do not let fidelity to life lead you into pointlessness. Do not let the Point pull too hard on credibility.

Exercises

A. *Analysis*

Read several stories in current magazines for a study of Inversion, and of the methods of various writers in striking the balance between reality and the Point.

B. *Narrative Style*

Write five or six sentences or bits of dialogue employing the principle of inversion.

Examples:

"Now I remember," said the Countess with a shrug. "He is the horrid fellow who stirred his coffee."

The plan was that, as soon as Jim's leg was better, he was to be taken to the Zoo to see the elephants and the monkeys, and to eat peanuts to his heart's content.

C. *Narrative*

Do one of the following:

1. Tell the fable of the grasshopper and the ant, beginning with the winter scene.

2. In his youth Frank Carney injured Harrison Grey, without the latter's knowledge of how it happened. Twenty years later he makes Harrison happy by befriending his son, but still without divulging the earlier connection.

Create the details. Write the scene, in dialogue, in which Frank aids, or promotes, young Grey. Invert the preceding action and the reference to Harrison's pleasure in his son's progress.

3. A man sets out to injure another, but succeeds only in hurting some one dear to him. He learns of the outcome too late to right it.

Single, final scene. Dialogue. Inversion.

4. A man has shouldered the blame of another. His son, learning this as a boy, keeps it a secret, but is inspired by the example. At a crucial moment, the son explains to his father that the latter has been the model, and the father feels repaid for the sacrifice.

Single scene. Dialogue. Inversion.

5. Create a Simple Chronicle of interesting events covering a long period of time. White the final scene, largely in dialogue, as an Inverted Chronicle. (Perhaps one of your clippings can be of service, or an anecdote of some member of your family.)

6. Write a monologue scene, entirely in the first person, involving use of inversion.

Chapter X

THE SINGLE SCENE: I, EMOTION

I

The scene is the outstanding element of modern narrative. Novelist, historian, and biographer have learned to lift this vehicle from the drama, and to fill in the design of plot with the detail of speech as well as of action. Your old-fashioned story—like the *Arabian Nights* or *Robinson Crusoe*—was often a mere spinning out of remarkable events, in the fashion of a record or chronicle. Since the eighteenth century, however, there has been a decided trend in favor of narrative plentifully supplied with dialogue. The anecdote has given way to the scene.

What is a scene?

First of all, it contains the machinery of one action. In the story of a murder, for example, there would be three distinct central images: the preparation, the crime, the aftermath. Each would be at least one scene. Secondly, the senses should be trained on one place or locale. If a week-end party moves indoors out of the rain, the scene in the garden and the one about the fireplace are generally to be considered separate and distinct. If, as on the stage, one of the characters leaves the garden and later returns, the scene is in no wise divided, so long as the story con-

tinues to deal with the people in the garden. Thirdly, an interval of time, such as the lapse between the emptying and the re-filling of a room, would initiate a new scene, for the action is probably changed, or significantly varied, by such a breach. Fourthly, the entrance or exit of an important person denotes the beginning of a new step in the story. And finally, though this is only half true, a scene is generally rendered after the dramatic model, in dialogue. Of course, one may give scene after scene, as Poe does, with little or no direct discourse, yet this pantomimic action bears close resemblance to the anecdote or the chronicle, and seems something different from what we usually call a scene.

II

MODEL 9. *The Invisible Beast*

As we emerged from the *chapparal* Morgan was but a few yards in advance. Suddenly we heard, at a little distance to our right and partly in front, a noise as of some animal thrashing about in the bushes, which we could see were violently agitated.

"We've started a deer," I said. "I wish we had brought a rifle."

Morgan, who had stopped and was intently watching the *chapparal,* said nothing, but had cocked both barrels of his gun and was holding it in readiness to aim. I thought him a trifle excited, which surprised me, for he had a reputation for exceptional coolness, even in moments of sudden and imminent peril.

"Oh, come," I said. "You are not going to fill up a deer with quail-shot, are you?"

Still he did not reply; but catching a sight of his face as he turned it toward me, I was struck by the intensity of his look. Then I understood that we had serious business in hand, and my first conjecture was that we had "jumped" a grizzly. I advanced to Morgan's side, cocking my piece as I moved.

The bushes were now quiet and the sounds had ceased, but Morgan was as attentive to the place as before.

"What is it? What the devil is it?" I asked.

"That Damned Thing!" he replied, without turning his head.

I was about to speak further, when I observed the wild oats near the place of disturbance moving in the most inexplicable way. I can hardly describe it. It seemed as if stirred by a streak of wind, which not only bent it but pressed it down—crushed it so that it did not rise; and this movement was slowly prolonging itself directly toward us.

BIERCE, "The Damned Thing"

The most remarkable thing about this selection is that the author (through his deputy narrator) although depicting terror most powerfully, himself remains quite calm. No outcries, no references to heart beat or blood pressure, no introspection. The job is done entirely by means of images of the external. Even Morgan's reaction is to be gathered only from his carriage, his facial expression, and his one terse exclamation. Bierce restrains the impulse to wallow in what amateurs mistake for "character analysis." He says that Morgan is known to be a cool hand, and then shows him too frightened to speak. Furthermore, the imagery is displayed with such intellectual repose

that the reader takes it for truth, and feels the hair begin to rise on his head. Whether Bierce himself felt the emotion before or during the writing of his scene makes no difference. He calculated every word to present a sense of fear in Morgan, and to stir it in the reader. He succeeded; and he reached a pinnacle of representative art.

The Point is given in the endings of the two last paragraphs:

> He trembled visibly

and

> this movement was slowly prolonging itself directly toward us.

In *trembling* we have the Point-Word connoted—*fear;* and the last paragraph is the Point-Image of *the fearful thing.* Such treatment may be called "suggestive" since the actual Point is hinted at, rather than expressed. The hint, however, is pretty well stressed.

Observe how the conflict is stated in the first two paragraphs. The invisibility of the opponent is not allowed to weaken the sense of opposition, for other imagery is supplied. Can you locate the instances? Is there conflict in the Point-Sentence?

Since this is a scene of struggle, there is a strong current of kinæsthetic imagery throughout. In addition, the images are clear-cut, because both characters are straining their attention on the phenomena of the

approaching conflict. As for the action,—study the verbs, and see for yourself.

The very wording is interesting, for two reasons: First, the absence of such terms as *horror, terrifying,* and *frightfully* is what gives the selection its air of reserve and tension. Instead of such verbal bombs, we have quieter phrases: *a trifle excited, the intensity of his look, husky and unnatural, trembled visibly.* When Morgan says, "That Damned Thing!" the words stand out with grisly force against a background comparatively mild. Secondly, note that the above phrases are arranged in a climactic order, each a little more intense than the preceding. Thus the words are made to point the way to the climax at the end. Another instance, in the final paragraph, is the ascending order of the synonyms for *moving: stirred, pressed, crushed, prolonging itself directly toward us.* The additional force of each new verb tightens the interest and vivifies the sense of the closer approach of horror.

It was with this model in view that the lists of synonyms were assigned. When you write your scenes, try to make as careful a selection and as artistic an arrangement of your verbal material. As you can see, it is not necessary for a writer to mention everything that comes into his head. The best effect, indeed, may often arise from the reader's feeling that you could have said more—uselessly—but had the conscience to hold it in reserve. The great writer always impresses us as knowing more than he says, because he says only the best that he knows.

III

The object of this chapter is to prepare the student for the writing of a single scene indicative of a single emotion.

We set out, of course, with the specific emotion suggested by the clipping—fear, hatred, remorse, generosity, love, joy, or pity. That, as we know, is the Point. We have that, already. We have also a collection of sense impressions and a list of synonyms suitable to the theme.

Our first task is to connect the Point and the central image of the clipping in such a way as to create the Point-Image—the picture that is to conclude the scene. Let us say that the Point is *despair* and that it is to be related to the central image of the father of a lost child. Then the Point-Image may be that of a man staring brokenly at a baby's hair ribbon; or it may be a cry wrung from a heart that comprehends the blankness of the future; or it may be the limp droop of a weary body returning from fruitless search.

Whichever it is, let us combine it with the word *despair* in some such Point-Sentence as this:

No longer able to conceal his *despair* from the frantic women, Ralph *fell back in his chair and covered his face with his hands.*

The reason for including the Point-Word is that the novice may the more surely drive home his meaning. The casual reader would not find the inclusion obvious or forced, since he is interested in the image. Above all, the ending has been made conclusive.

Thus much assured, it is now a question of supplying the image antecedent to the last. What made the father collapse? Did the mother, holding out a trinket purchased for the coming birthday, cry out that she would never see it on her baby's finger? Did some tactless person make reference to a similar mystery never solved? Let it be what you will. If it serves to introduce the close, your outline is begun.

For the middle of the scene, employ some phase of conflict. The father may have been struggling to rouse the spirits of his wife. The mother, desperate to learn the facts of the search, may by her questioning have revealed the significance of certain things to which her husband had half-consciously blinded himself. The reason for introducing conflict is that, without it, your piece will be mere description, whereas you are aiming at narrative. Similarly, the use of images will obviate an introspective treatment resulting in character analysis, and will produce the basis of action, without which the scene will be inert.

For the introduction, which need only *foreshadow* the Point without stating it (see the model), we need supply only *one* of the components of the Point-Sentence:

(*a*) The Point-Word, or some more general synonym:

As soon as she saw Ralph's face, Mary put her hand to her heart. He was smiling, but he smiled bravely, as a brave man smiles in the face of *despair*.

Ralph smiled so tenderly as he entered the room, that Mary's heart sank with a new *depression*.

(*b*) Part of the central image:

"Ralph—you *haven't found her.*"
His wife's tone cut him to the quick, but he had reinforced himself against just such a greeting.

"Now, Mary," he chided gently. "Other *children* have been *lost* for a day and have turned up quite safe and sound. I have no doubt that . . ." etc.

When the rough plan-backward has been written, dash off a synopsis, from beginning to end, in order to make certain that there is a complete scene; that there are not two, or three, or more; that action, especially in conflict, and with some alternations, is provided; and that much of the writing may be within quotation marks. Inversion—such as the father's report of the vain search—should not be left to the final draft, but should be included in detail in the outlines.

Lest the writer, tangled in so many technical considerations, fail to see the forest for the trees, here is a parting admonition: Remember the reader. You are writing for him. He must feel himself to be in the presence of persons who, before his immediate perceptions, are acting out a great moment of their lives. If he does not share their emotion, he must at least realize it. That is, whether it is his head or his heart that you reach through the avenues of his senses, be sure that you reach something in him, and that you reach it beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Exercises

1. Read several stories in current magazines till you find a scene depicting emotions. Analyze it for the Point, the

imagery, the conflict, etc., after the fashion of the comment on Model 9.

2. On the basis of the material you have prepared, write a single scene indicative of a single emotion. Follow the method set forth in Section III above.

Such a scene might serve to develop the middle section of a short story by providing a motive or the turning point of the larger action. It would then probably be linked to the scenes before and after by means of transitions. Omit these. Omit everything but the one scene on which you are working. Start with a specific action or a bit of dialogue forecasting the end. Get the conflict going at once; and let it move straight on to the Point.

The scene should read as though it were complete in itself.

Provide a good title for it.

Study the model carefully before you do your planning.

Suggested Readings

Esenwein, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story*, pp. 181–197.
Uzzell, Thomas H.—*Narrative Technique*, Part I, Chapter I; Part III, Chapter VIII.

Chapter XI

PLOT: I, HOW TO ARRANGE THE MATERIALS

I

While we were conning the alphabet of narrative in the fables, we gathered material for our single scenes. Now that we are writing the scenes, we shall prepare several plots for short stories.

Who will deny that plots are difficult? They have a way of breaking down in the middle, or of collapsing at the end, with results truly depressing. The reason is that most amateurs do what but few professionals dare—they rely completely on the thing called inspiration. Now, there can be no doubt that a reality corresponding to the word "inspiration" does, indeed, exist. It is the gift, the talent, the divine spark which makes some tales masterpieces and which should not be entirely lacking in any.

Yet, just what this "inspiration" is, can hardly be explained. Nor does one know, offhand, without the testimony of time, just who has it, and who has not. Furthermore it is certainly in most cases a tricksy thing, with a worrisome way of vanishing in thin air, at the very moment when the young author lies reveling in its advent. The most sensible—the professional—way to regard it is to recognize it as a force that must be captured and harnessed before it can be mounted.

Not even the expert can ride this rearing colt of a Pegasus before it has been broken to the bit.

Therefore a little horsemanship will not be amiss. What we shall do in this chapter, and in one or two like it, will be to learn some devices for turning a good idea into a workable structure. We are not going to create an original plot just yet, any more than we are going to write an original short story. Both of these highly desirable outcomes lie only a short way ahead—so short, indeed, that we had better employ the brief interval in learning and practicing some of the tricks of the trade.

II

We again turn to our invaluable clippings for a "push." What we need now is not so much imagistic material, as the account of something unusual, one of those reports that make people cry out that truth is stranger than fiction. This assures at least one touch of fantasy—life playing the wizard—without which the senses are mere tools, and about which imagination may rear the scaffolding of structure.

The clipping reprinted below has been used time and time again as a trial-horse for those unaccustomed to the saddle. It is a theme ultimately too difficult to tempt the beginner to composition. What it requires is the rich humanity of a Howells, a Mary E. Wilkins. Yet it is simple enough in its mechanical elements to provide a clear illustration of how one may build up the skeleton of a tale, even though the telling be beyond one's inexpertness. Thus may be learned the double

lesson of craft and modesty, neither of which the hasty amateur may afford to ignore.

Sweethearts Wed after Separation of Forty Years[1]

Defiance, O.—They were sweethearts in childhood, but each married another.

After forty years and after the wedded mate of each had died, they finally met once more by chance and were married.

That familiar plot of fiction was enacted at Farmer, crossroads hamlet of Defiance County, recently, with the marriage of Arthur Goodhue and Mrs. Stella Hinton, at the home of Mrs. Hinton's daughter.

Goodhue and Stella Taylor were sweethearts together in Farmer nearly a half century ago. Then he was her "beau."

Their incipient romance was abruptly interrupted, however, and they drifted apart, each to marry another. Miss Taylor became Mrs. Hinton, and resided in Letcher, S. D.

She returned to the home of her daughter, near Bryan, for a visit last September. She was then a widow.

While she was being entertained at the home of Mrs. D. C. Curtis, a daughter of Arthur Goodhue, she chanced to meet her girlhood sweetheart. His wife had died some time before.

Some years ago Goodhue was the owner of a successful chicken farm near Farmer. He has announced that he will resume that business.

One reading should suffice to shcw that here we have again the breath of deathless romance, mellowed by life's declining, and shot through with one golden stroke of long-watching Providence. What a masterpiece Sarah Orne Jewett, or Mrs. Gaskell, might have

[1] The names of the persons have been changed.

made of this! To the immature, to the unsympathetic, there is only the bald account of two prosy old farm-people in their middle or late fifties. That is why no amateur, no matter how he knew his Ohio, would succeed at a task so subtle with memories never aged by a lifetime of the drab!

Since the skeleton, however, is comparatively so simple, the beginner has an opportunity for practice not offered by the cleverer sort of tale whose trickery is more agreeable to youthful inventiveness. So, even though the loves of Arthur and Stella may leave you cold, check your impatience, and give heed to the difficult job of making a plot out of a good idea.

As the clipping stands, of course, it is not a short story. Yet it contains the outstanding elements of any story that might be based on it. Let us examine it for these. First, and foremost, the Point. The headline gives and is that: *Sweethearts wed after separation of forty years.* Can you imagine the closing scene? The old couple are seated together on the porch step of their new home, basking in the afternoon sunshine of the love that is neither new nor old. Suddenly, Arthur gives a mysterious chuckle. Stella glances at him in question. For answer, he takes her to a gnarled maple in the yard, and points to a scar in the bark. It is the beginning of what might have been intended for the letter S.

"I don't remember," she murmured.

"Clean forgot, myself," he confessed. "Your Uncle Bill come out 'n' chased us before I was half-started."

"The mornin' you and me ran away from the picnic!"

He had his knife out, and began to make a preliminary outline to finish the letter.

"The A, too, Arthur. You kin deepen 'em both, after." This with her hand on his shoulder, so that both of his might be free.

"Forty years ago," he commented. But when he tried to repeat it, he couldn't.

So she gently laid her head on the back of her hand, and murmured for him: "Forty years, dear."

At any rate, something of the sort.

Yet, so far as plot is concerned, to have only the ending is little better than to have only the beginning. The middle is the long stretch. It must not sag. What scenes are to fill out the body of the tale? How was the marriage brought about? By what steps of courtship? How shall the courtship be livened by alternations of conflict? Did either of the two have to persuade the other that some old grievance was baseless, or outlawed by time, or regretted and atoned for? Was Arthur bashful again? Or Stella remote? Did another "difference" arise and threaten the union anew? How about objections from the children? Gossip by the neighbors?

These questions deal with the progress of the courtship itself. What of the events anterior to the great meeting "at the home of Mrs. D. C. Curtis, a daughter of Arthur Goodhue"? What were the events, to go back all the way to childhood, that enforced separation and yet kept memories fresh? What were the youthful affections that sank roots so stubbornly deep in

memory? Did Arthur and Stella "grow up together"? What was their first love scene, their first avowal? What did people say? Was there a quarrel? Was Arthur too young, too poor, too encumbered with dependents, to marry? Why, how, when did they separate? Who was this Hinton that Stella married? Why did they go to Dakota? How did the daughter come to return to the old neighborhood? When was *she* born? What sort of person was she?

What a forest of interrogatives! Even in this simple tale, the personal biographies branch out too complexly to be retained as mental memoranda. We must do somewhat after the method of Balzac; that is, sketch individual histories of the important persons before we can write the tale of a few weeks of their lives. To make the story consistent, we must know the lives of the characters, if only in chronological outline. Otherwise we may make Arthur's daughter a matron of thirty-five in one place, and, in another cause her to act as though she were a bride of twenty! We meet her as Mrs. D. C. Curtis. What was her first name before she was married? When was she born? Here is the province of minute invention.

We need, therefore, a kind of parallel chart which will give at a glance not merely the Simple Chronicle of the life of each of the figures, but the activities of all of them at any given time. When the imagination works unaided by the direction of experience or the guidance of an outline, it is likely to develop part of a narrative at the expense of other parts, or even to

go afield entirely in the evolving of matter interesting in itself but extraneous to the theme. There is such a thing as getting one's material into shape before planning the story proper. In our present task, for example, we know only that Arthur and Stella are to meet and love and marry after a separation of forty years. We have clews to other elements, but we dare not go ahead on the basis of material so meager. We must become more intimate with the situation, partly by free deduction, partly by out-and-out manufacture of incident.

We are taking it for granted that the lovers are in their fifties because they both have married children. If we assume that Arthur is fifty-two, then he was twelve at the time of the separation. If this chronology is satisfactory, we may adopt it. But it leaves a gap of some years between the end of the infantile romance and the probable age of serious courtship, of eligibility for marriage. It may be wiser, therefore, to make Arthur eighteen when he and Stella part. Thus he is fifty-eight when the story opens. Since the clipping is of 1924, the hero was eighteen in 1884. Here, for working purposes, is an important date; for the writer must know enough of Ohio in 1884 to write convincingly. In the same way, if Stella is fifty-six at the time of reunion, she was sixteen in 1884. Whatever year we select to begin with, we have a starting point for a kind of calendar of the lives of our persons.

In other connections, the clews being vague, we have more leeway for invention. We are told, for example,

MULTIPLE CHRONICLE

Event Number	Year	Arthur	Stella	The Two Daughters	All
1	1884	18 years old	16 years old		Arthur and Stella still sweethearts
2	1885	Father dies	Meets Hinton Letcher, S. D.		Arthur and Stella separate
3	1886	Begins to support mother			Stella's marriage
4	1887	Meets Alice Budd	First child	Belle Hinton born	Stella's daughter born
5	1890	Arthur and Alice married			Arthur brings wife home to live with mother
6	1892	First child Death of mother		Clara Goodhue born	Arthur's daughter born
7	1906	Meets Belle	Sends note to Arthur, introducing daughter	Belle meets John Fiske	Belle visits grandmother at Bryan
8	1907	Arthur and family at Belle's wedding	Too ill to travel to wedding	Belle marries Fiske	Belle and John Fiske married

9	1909	Arthur forgives Clara for eloping. Alice does not.	Sends congratulations to Clara through Belle	Clara elopes with D. C. Curtis unexpectedly	Clara's amazing elopement
10	1911	Arthur and Alice quarrel over Clara.		Clara's first child	Arthur separated from his wife
11	1912	Widower, lives with daughter	Sends Arthur her condolences	Belle helpful at awkward funeral	Death of Alice
12	1923	Sends condolences to Stella	Widow sells home, goes to visit Belle	Belle invites mother to visit	Death of Hinton
13	1924	Hears of Stella's visit	Visits Belle, meets Clara	Daughters arrange match	Stella comes home again

Line of Inversion

14	May, 1924	The meeting			
15	May, 1924	The courtship			
16	June, 1924	The marriage			

that the widowed Stella comes East to visit a daughter. This woman is unnamed. Let us call her Mrs. John Fiske, née Belle Hinton. If we decide to make her age thirty-seven, she was born in 1887. For the present we will say that she was born in South Dakota, that she paid a visit to her maternal grandmother in 1906, at the age of nineteen; that she met John Fiske and was married to him; and that her residence is thus her mother's birthplace. Similarly, we work out a scheme for Mrs. D. C. Curtis, Arthur's daughter, and trace the course of the two younger women's acquaintance.

If we plot such details on separate charts, we are likely to be involved in inconsistencies. What we need is an outline that will give each character a column for chronology and that will provide a bird's-eye view of all the characters in such-and-such a year. The name Multiple Chronicle, applied to the accompanying diagram, is therefore a convenient designation which should explain itself (pp. 104-5). For the sake of clearness, however, let us define this device as follows: A Multiple Chronicle is the sum-total of the Simple Chronicles of a story, arranged in parallel columns.

What we have here, as has been said before, is an arrangement of the events, not of the story, but of the material. Hence, some of the elements of a Multiple Chronicle need never get into the final draft of the narrative. The date of Clara Goodhue's marriage to D. C. Curtis is an instance of this sort. The reader will accept our statement that she is Mrs. D. C. Curtis

without demanding to be shown the marriage certificate. In fact, he will be puzzled and bored if we attempt to show it to him. But for our own purposes, to keep the images in order in our own minds, it may be wise to establish the date of the event to round out our knowledge of the persons whose lives we are narrating.

Do not make a fetich of the Multiple Chronicle. Some authors fill in their backgrounds as they go along, or let them take care of themselves. Others keep the background "in their heads." The latter procedure is difficult for the amateur, as he himself knows. The Multiple Chronicle is therefore only a representation of a mental process often, though not always, important in the preliminary stages of narrative composition. Exercise yourself, therefore, in the act of orderly planning, and not in the memorizing of the chart or the revering of the appellation, which is only a convenience for reference in these exercises.

In going over the diagram, you will note that certain qualifying events are omitted: the pictures of the earlier courtship and the separation; the sort of husband Hinton was to Stella; Alice's reasons for holding out against her husband and her daughter; the existence of children other than the two daughters; grandchildren; the death or survival of Arthur's parents. Note, also, that some of the events listed may have to be changed. We have made the two daughters conspire to promote the match between their parents. Perhaps only Mrs. Curtis is to be the matchmaker.

THE OUTLINE PROPER

Major Division	Scene	Imagery, Action, Dialogue Conflict	Inversion
A. *The meeting*			General chronology, with a dash of humorous or sentimental anecdote of childhood romance. Mention of Arthur's old chicken farm.
	Parlor of Curtis home. First the three women. Then Arthur	Setting, etc., introducing lovers. Struggle within each. Re-forming of ties	
	Arthur and Stella converse on porch	Each wary of the other, but groping to reunion. Arrangement to visit old teacher, now 74	Loneliness in mourning, but resignation. Mention of old scenes, old teacher
	Departure of Belle and Stella	Attempts of two daughters to appraise situation. The elders too canny, and not yet themselves decided. Daughters beam.	

THE OUTLINE PROPER.—*Continued*

B. *The courtship*	The drive to the old teacher's home	Cautious "feelers"—practical. Horse shies. Stella alarmed. Arthur re-assures. The ice broken. Arthur's wish to resume farming. Stella's wish to settle in old town.	Arthur sums up economic biography. Desires own home again. Stella tells of Dakota and legacy. Would prefer small eastern farm.
	They pass Uncle Goodhue's old farm, once more for sale		
	The teacher's home and garden	Spinster teacher teases lovers into blushing and re-arouses old emotions.	Teacher "tells tales" of puppy-love.
	Inspection of farm on the way home. The unspoken dream		
	Belle's boy ill. Union in time of trouble	Purchase of farm, etc.	Etc.
	Proposal and acceptance		
	Decision to elope		
C. *The marriage*	The wedding at the new minister's		
	The new home. The message to the children		
	The maple in the yard		

Perhaps Belle Fiske is jealous for the memory of her father, only recently dead. Is there a scene in which Stella overcomes this opposition by relating some secret of the past? Or is the same end accomplished by the brief illness of some one? Or do the lovers merely go off and get married?

At any rate, the gross outline is on paper. It may be condensed, amplified, revised. That is the main virtue of any outline. And the Multiple Chronicle, however dispensable its various parts, however it may differ from the final product in form, provides an excellent rack upon which to hang the details until one wishes to make use of them. Before we deal directly with this matter, however, observe the so-called line of inversion. It cuts across the Multiple Chronicle at event 14—the meeting. Some writers might prefer to commence a little later—at some crucial moment in the courtship, for example, or at some moment of the elopement—but the inversion, of which there must be much in a story dominated largely by reminiscence, would seem to demand more rather than less leisureliness in the telling. If we begin at the Curtis home, moreover, we have a simple outline for the narrative itself in events 14, 15, and 16:

(*a*) The Meeting.
(*b*) The Courtship.
(*c*) The Marriage.

These three provide the large forms into which one may fit every other element of the story, in some such Outline Proper as the chart on pages 108-9 suggests.

HOW TO ARRANGE THE MATERIALS

The outline is purposely left unfinished to provide exercise and discussion. You will find that the column marked "Scenes" provides a continuity fairly complete. Would an additional scene make for greater clearness? Would you omit certain scenes, or make a new arrangement altogether? What would you add to "Imagery" and "Inversion" to complete the middle section? Similarly, how would you reinforce the conflict, or sketch the closing section?

Exercise

Copy the Outline Proper, making such changes as you deem necessary. Finish the plan of the plot on the basis of the Multiple Chronicle. Use concrete imagery, not abstractions, and maintain a flow of continuity.

Do not commence till you *feel* the reality of the events. In this connection, it may be advisable to read *Ethan Frome* by Edith Wharton, or "A New England Nun" by Mary E. Wilkins, or *A Son of the Middle Border* by Hamlin Garland, or any story or novel that will help you to get the atmosphere.

If necessary, rearrange the Multiple Chronicle—but beware of inconsistencies.

Chapter XII

THE SINGLE SCENE: II, CHARACTER

I

The word *character* has so many applications as to make it well-nigh impossible of definition. We speak of the "character" of a place, or of a bit of advice, or a literary style, or even a material substance like iron or cotton, with the vague notion of *quality*. In connection with our human kind, "character" may mean the sum-total of traits, individual or social, from which each of us seems to draw his own peculiar combination. The range here, alone, is enormous. It includes everything from the babe's first cry to the death gasp, from viciousness to nobility, from feebleness to power. It is the whole texture of human life. Contemporary thinkers, like Edman,[1] have made descriptive catalogues of psychic mechanisms; and a host of psychologists are delving into every possible phase of behavior in its universal aspects. Indeed, one is tempted to prophesy that psychology from the social point of view is the great science of to-day and to-morrow.

Narrative art has certainly been colored by this rising interest within the past century; yet in the analysis

[1] Erwin Edman, *Human Traits and Their Social Significance* (Houghton Mifflin, 1920).

and delineation of what is termed the individual character, philosophy has yet to equal the great story-tellers. In a treatise, a mortal trait is likely to be as "dead" and impersonal as a physical force. *Avarice* becomes as impersonal, for instance, as *capillary attraction.* But a Shylock lives in the imagination by the profound stimulation of the senses and the emotions. As some one has said, science gives us the *resemblances* of things, but in psychology we are interested in how people *differ.* While contemporary thinkers are portraying a composite personality of the race, you and I are still very much fascinated by the business of distinguishing you and me. The narrator who, like Thackeray, can make his characters distinct, has never need to fear the lack of a public.

Yet, in many senses, no narrative artist can afford to ignore the many lights thrown upon character by modern science. One may reject, but hardly with a single sweep of the arms, and surely only after examination. For instance, the basic statement of the physicists that the whole universe is composed of electrons, in which matter and energy are one, is of incalculable significance. For, if all matter is so constituted, then the very flesh of our bodies, the very cells of our nerves, make one enormously important source of force and movement. The reactions of our minds are as truly *events* as are battles or sunsets. The very verb *to be* becomes a verb of action! A resolve may initiate or avert a catastrophe. Terrific conflict lies in mere indecision. Character itself, in

this interpretation, is more than a source of action. It *is* action!

In an age when the best informed admit themselves to be groping, or at most crawling toward knowledge, it is hopeless to attempt a definite statement of the meaning of character. One must read and read and still read what the thinkers and the technicians and the poets and the priests are reporting. A brief list of helpful scientific works is appended to this chapter. The serious student will read them, and from their bibliographies, read further. The information thus derived should be regarded always for its value, not in technical science, but in the enriching of fantasy. As long as you can tell your grandmother from Smith's, and make the world know the difference, you have in some measure the gift of delineation which Homer and Chaucer and Richardson gave to their characters in days before texts and test tubes.

II

MODEL 10. *The Old Beggar Woman*[2]

As he walked along, he saw an old woman hobbling in front of him. She was leaning on a stick, and her hand was red and swollen with rheumatism. She hobbled by reason of the fact that there were stones in her shapeless boots. She was draped in the sorriest miscellaneous rags that could be imagined, and these were knotted together so intricately that her clothing, having once been attached to her body, could never again be detached from it. As

[2] James Stephens, *The Crock of Gold* (Macmillan, 1912). Reprinted by permission.

she walked she was mumbling and grumbling to herself, so that her mouth moved round and round in an india-rubber fashion.

The Philosopher soon caught up on her.

"Good morrow, ma'am," said he.

But she did not hear him: she seemed to be listening to the pain which the stones in her shoes gave her.

"Good morrow, ma'am," said the Philosopher again.

This time she heard him and replied, turning her old, bleared eyes slowly in his direction—

"Good morrow to yourself, sir," said she, and the Philosopher thought her old face was a very kindly one.

"What is it that is wrong with you, ma'am?" said he.

"It's my boots, sir," she replied. "Full of stones they are, the way I can hardly walk at all, God help me!"

"Why don't you shake them out?"

"Ah, sure, I couldn't be bothered, sir, for there are so many holes in the boots that more would get in before I could take two steps, and an old woman can't always be fidgeting, God help her!"

JAMES STEPHENS, *The Crock of Gold*

This little gem of a scene gives not merely the lively portrait of an old woman, but the keynote of her time of life—helpless age. As the Point-Sentence puts it: "An *old* woman can't always be fidgeting, God *help* her!"

So delicately is the physical description drawn that the conflict escapes a first reading. The poor crone is as stolid to the triumph of the sharp stones as are her holey boots. Indeed, she is too well trained in futility to be roused by the suggestion to shake them out. So close is the issue that the Philosopher must struggle

with her deafness to secure her greeting. It will not be long before God will "help her." An excellent instance, this, of the fact that conflict does not by any means demand cannon or even blows.

Since the *aim* of such a piece is description, though the *instrument* be narrative, a close analysis will reveal that the story-telling devices have been overlaid on familiar framework; that is, upon certain of the principles of topic-development you learned when you were studying paragraph structure as a part of rhetoric. The topic is *helpless old age.* Of this, the images are *details:* the hand *red and swollen with rheumatism, stones in the shapeless old boots, india-rubber fashion,* etc. So, too, most of the actions are *specific instances* of the same idea: *hobbling, leaning on a stick, draped . . . in rags, mumbling and grumbling, she did not hear, turning her old, bleared eyes slowly,* etc. Finally, note what in less skillful hands would be mere repetition—the *iteration* of *stones in boots* in four variations, and the two variations of the prayer for *help.*

Nor can we pass on without pausing on those two fine images of the india-rubber jaw and the listening to the pain. The latter is a stroke of genius, and illustrates the generalization that a single touch of heaven-sent inspiration may electrify mere words with life. Note that in each case not only the visual, but the auditory and the kinæsthetic are brought into play. In the second there is even a bite of the organic—pain —to make the reader wince. Great imagery evokes

many mental functions at one stroke. Read Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" for the full force of this remark.

As a matter of mere mechanical technique, study the configuration, or appearance, of the short paragraphing, and the punctuation of the speeches.

In the companion-piece reprinted below, there is, in addition to the rhetorical elements already reviewed, a powerful auxiliary to conflict in the double *contrast.* Can you state it? What, in your opinion, is the Point? Is the conflict varied and intensified by making the object of the contest a living creature? What touches of conflict are there in the second paragraph?

MODEL 11. *The Disappointment*[3]

The old woman grinned at the dog—

"Ah, you thing, you!" said she, and she gave it her finger to bite. The delighted puppy chewed her bony finger, and then instituted a mimic warfare against a piece of rag that fluttered from her breast, barking and growling in joyous excitement, while the old woman fondled and hugged it.

The door of the house opposite opened, and a woman with a frost-bitten face came out.

"Leave that dog down," said she.

"Sure, ma'am, I wouldn't hurt the little dog, the thing!"

"Put down that dog," said the woman, "and go about your business—the likes of you ought to be arrested."

A man in shirt-sleeves appeared behind her, and at him the old woman grinned even more humbly.

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[3] James Stephens, *The Crock of Gold* (Macmillan, 1912). Reprinted by permission.

"Let me sit for a while and play with the little dog, sir," said she, "sure the roads do be lonesome—"

The man stalked close and grabbed the dog by the scruff of the neck. It hung between his finger and thumb with its tail tucked between its legs, and its eyes screwed round on one side in amazement.

"Be off with you out of that, you old strap!" said the man in a terrible voice.

So the old woman rose painfully to her feet again, and as she went hobbling along the dusty road she began to cry.

JAMES STEPHENS, *The Crock of Gold*

EXERCISE

Plan and compose a scene, on the basis of your clipping, to set forth a trait of character.

In the outline, sketch the Point-Sentence, and construct backward. Write a synopsis in a single paragraph of 50-100 words. Then cast the scene in dialogue, in imitation of the models.

Provide an element of conflict.

SUGGESTED READINGS

BAKER, H. T.—*The Contemporary Short Story*, Chapter IV.
CLARK, Glenn—*A Manual of the Short Story Art*, Part I, Chapter VIII.
ESENWEIN, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story*, Part II, Chapter XI.
GRABO, Carl H.—*The Art of the Short Story*, Chapters VII and VIII.
UZZELL, Thomas H.—*Narrative Technique*, Chapter V.

NOTE: Read a short story by one of the following authors, seeking especially single scenes devoted to the portrayal of character. Analyze for Point, Vocabulary, Structure, Conflict: Henry James, Edith Wharton, Booth Tarkington, Sherwood Anderson, Edna Ferber, Fannie Hurst, Irvin S. Cobb, Wilbur Daniel Steele.

Chapter XIII

PLOT: II, TREATMENT OF AN ORIGINAL THEME

One reason for cautioning the reader of Chapter XI against trying to write the story of the elderly lovers is that he probably could not project it in the senses and the feelings of his own mind. He could not see Arthur's hand lying on Stella's as they jogged along the shady lane, behind the nodding old mare. He could not experience the reopening of heart and vista when Arthur peered cautiously into his former sweetheart's eyes and saw her tremble between disillusion and remembered yearning.

That is why young writers are constantly admonished to write about what they know. You have only to attempt to visualize a story of unfamiliar people and scenes, and then to recall one similar, but of actual experience, to see at once the extraordinary advantage of having the imagery in the bank, as it were, instead of on tick. Hence the value of casting an amazing incident in an accustomed setting. The interest of the unusual is heightened by the firmness of tone and treatment.

Of course, the word "familiar" does not at all mean "external," exclusively. Farms, streets, buildings, animals, airships, mountains, and tornadoes are not the whole of reality. There are, as we know, sensations

within the body as actual as the phenomena without. The eyes and the ears bring messages of sight and sound; and also the eyeballs revolve with a kinæsthetic accompaniment, and the drums may have an organic ache only too well-known. So, too, with the emotions and the phantasmagoria arising therefrom. Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" has legions of readers because it images in every sense a horror as profound as human nature. We read a phase of ourselves in it, a reality perhaps more easily recognized than the house across the street. If, therefore, a writer be well versed in his own heart, and if the pictures he raises before fancy are peculiarly his own in experience as much as in expression, he is writing about "what he knows."

Ah, if only one could *know* "what he knows"! So many of our truest reactions pass unnoticed in consciousness! They are second nature, often remaining indistinguishable from the first! Many a mind, especially equipped to observe along a certain line, not merely never expresses the specialty, but is barely more than aware of it. Thus, many a writer gropes for years before he chances upon the materials suited to his hand—and many, many more never get beyond groping. There are experiences, old-wives' tales, and daydreams so engrossing that we revel in them unaware of a content eminently available for art. Many a nose turns up at the mere mention of the one field its possessor could cultivate. A certain clear-eyed self-awareness is necessary. A Stevenson possesses it by divine right. An amateur should cultivate it.

And cultivation—especially in knowing oneself—takes time. The impatient novice hurries to compose, without a plan, without a jotting, with nothing but a vague glow of the expanded ego. No wonder he so often fails! The discovery that the great inspiration is only a delusion is often a bitter one. How much better to plot and toil, knowing all the time that such preliminaries are not the finished product! The disappointment that would otherwise crush, is turned to a realization of a lack to be filled, an error to be corrected. The first joy of creation becomes the lively happiness of work cherished and advanced toward success. You can drop your planning, take it up again, and alter it to your heart's and mind's content. And when at last you begin to write, your hand is steady and sure. You have taken pains. You have taken time.

This sermon on the theme *Haste makes waste* is preached to admonish the student not only against overhasty composition, but more specifically against rashness in the belief that one has a story to write when he has no more than an urge to be applauded. Be patient. Be reserved. Be sure, and in all calmness sure, that you have the stuff of a story. Ask yourself every discouraging question you can. Is there any matter beyond one remarkable event?—one moment of emotional tension? Does your enthusiasm spring from the joy of discovering something original, or from mere glad recognition of a similarity between your theme and that of a tale you have reason to admire?

Are you flattered by the chance to write like De Maupassant, or urged to expression because images of your own teem your brain with the truth of true fancy? If the clipping, or whatever impels you to work, does not touch the secret spring of creation within you, turn to something else. Keep hunting. Discuss your "finds" with others bitten by the same artist-virus. Do not even make a jotting till your heart says: "This is my dream. I must express it. I have no more doubt of its reality than I have of my own."

Then, immediately, begin, not to write, but to analyze and to plot. First—the Point. Always, and invariably, the Point. Then the Point-Image, the Point-Sentence, the Point-Scene. Then the flow of creative imagery, backward and forward. Then, bit by bit, the Multiple Chronicle.

Try not to force your own hand. In every step, let the imagination work of its own accord. If you find yourself stuck, go out for a walk, and come back to the job when the job comes back to you. Consider yourself extremely lucky if a week of steady application produces a rough Multiple Chronicle—one that must be considerably revised before a synopsis is even conceivable.

Since this is to be a test of your story-*making* power, there is no need of your confining yourself to a clipping, to clippings, or to any other specific source of material. Perhaps you have an idea of your own that you would like to experiment on. If so, write a rough statement of it that may be substituted for a clipping

as a basis of operations. When you are certain that your sketch is suitable, proceed as you would in the case of a clipping—proceed according to the advice given in the paragraphs above. The task may prove burdensome, tedious, hopeless, at times. But you have an idea, and you have a technique, and persistence and common sense should produce a plot for you.

Exercise

From a wide range of clippings, memories, or original themes, select one that seems to you and your wisest advisers to be fit for development into an original short story.

Determine the Point. Write it down.

Imagine the Point-Scene. Write a sketch of it.

Give each person, important or not, a name.

On a very large sheet of paper, write a trial Multiple Chronicle.

Make each entry an image if you can; and try to make it an image in action and in conflict.

Omit no event that is needed to lead to the Point. Thus you preserve the necessary continuity.

Do not duplicate events in different wording.

Do not introduce events impertinent to the Point. Save them for another story.

Condense the Multiple Chronicle, and re-write it neatly, in ink.

Note: Do this exercise while you are working on that of the next chapter. You will thus have a variety of employment to fill in the gaps of failing inspiration. Have the Multiple Chronicle ready before you start to read Chapter XV.

Suggested Readings

Stevenson, Robert Louis—Introduction to *Treasure Island.*
Baker, H. T.—*The Contemporary Short Story,* Chapter IV.

CLARK, Glenn—*A Manual of the Short Story Art,* Part III, Chapter III: The Thirty-six Original Plot Situations.

ESENWEIN, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story,* Part II, Chapters I–VI.

PHILLIPS, H. A.—*The Plot of the Short Story,* Chapters VII–IX.

UZZELL, Thomas H.—*Narrative Technique,* Part II, Chapter III.

NOTE: Write the Multiple Chronicle of some brief masterpiece which employs inversion. One of O. Henry's "surprise" pieces will serve the purpose admirably.

Chapter XIV

THE SINGLE SCENE: III, ACTION AND CLIMAX

I

EINSTEIN, among others, has defined an event as a manifestation of energy at a given time in a given place. The falling of a tree or a leaf, the drip of acid or tears, a blow or the fury that moves one to strike—the whole of nature and human nature is in one sense a giant cauldron of happenings. In this seethe, scientists behold certain associations upon which to base predictions of future events. We thus get the so-called laws of nature or reason, in chemistry, in mathematics, in economics. Narrators, concerned rather with fantasy than with fact, gaze at the great tempest of events and see certain associations of quality or sequence. In a million separate drops of rain, and a million distinct rays of sunlight, they see the single arch of the rainbow.

Indeed, it is almost completely true that the universe is a tempest of actions, and that each man selects out of the chaos his own picture of life. A rainstorm, to the scientist, is a matter of pressures and temperatures and condensations. To the farmer it is the growth or the rot of his crop. To the merchant it is an empty store or the sale of umbrellas. Naturally, the rain is in some respects the same to all men. It is, for

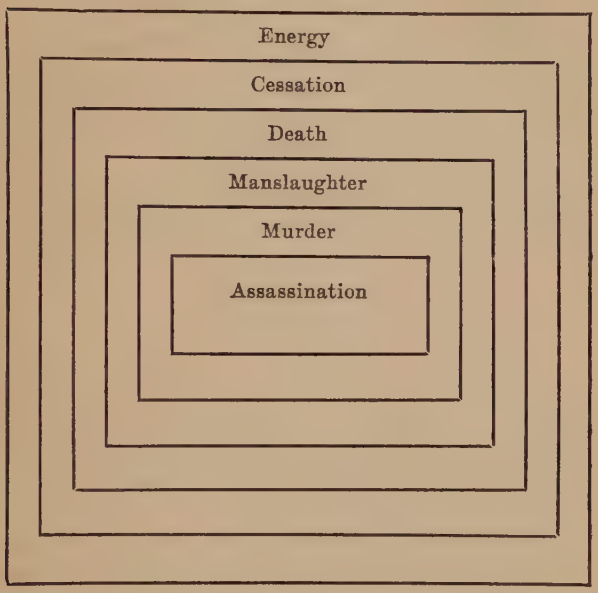
example, wet. To the individual, however, the gist of the story lies in what is for him the Point.

For the story man there is an additional distinction. He may share in the reaction of any of his fellows; but one element, only incidental to them, with him is prime. It lies in the matter of expression. It is bound up, not only in events, but in words. After he has understood the chemist, sympathized with the farmer and the merchant, shivered in terror with the savage, he has still to deal with the four letters that make up the written symbol of *rain*. No less than the elements of heaven and earth, his phenomena are meanings. In an elementary sense, he must consider synonyms, for the avoidance of repetition; concrete nouns for images; verbs for action and conflict. The whole of his art is in the writing on his paper. Nothing of his dream reaches his reader save through his words. We have seen that this is true of the whole composition or of one strategic word at the very end. The Point of the story is in every shred of it—but, most pointedly, at the end.

How does it happen that one word can carry the meaning of thousands? It is as a seed that bears plants that bear seeds. It is the cell of the amœba, splitting again and again into two amœbæ, till the test tube is full of them. Words, also, are often like the Chinese egg puzzle in their meanings. One contains another, *ad infinitum*. Let us, for example, consider a certain universal term, like *energy*. Now so far as man is concerned, one of the manifestations of

energy is its *cessation.* A kind of cessation, by natural causes, is *death.* Death, at the hands of another, is *manslaughter,* which, with intent to kill, is *murder.* And murder plotted by a group is *assassination.*

Consider the following figure:



Note that the very term which is narrowest in extent of meaning, that is, *assassination,* is the one which includes any or all of the others. In the same way, the comparatively general introduction of a tale may lead to narrower and more specific meanings, till the summary is reached in the Point. Cæsar, because of his *energy,* is objectionable to the conspirators. They

seek a *cessation* of his power, and plot his *murder.* This they accomplish by *assassinating* him—an act which marks the end of a certain sequence of events, of a major section of the tragedy.

Of course, it may be scientifically true that energy does not cease. It always is, as the universe always is, as existence always is. But, from the point of view of man, the vast assemblage of events or any group or sequence of them, may evince a certain effect on the mind which the mind calls "cessation." In the same arbitrary manner we may speak of "continuance" or "commencement" of energy. And in these three words

Commencement
Continuance
Cessation

we have the three fundamental groups of events in which we find or place every other: birth, life, death; ambition, struggle, success or failure; waking, working, sleeping; starting, going, stopping.

We can see, therefore, that one has only to find in life a certain similarity of associations about a certain Point—and the actions group themselves into series, and the series are symbolized in words. Othello is a man of passion who is at first freely trustful of both Desdemona and Iago. The villain converts the passion for the wife into destructive jealousy—by changing the Moor's point of view toward a woman *who herself remains unchanged in constancy!* Iago, the consummate fabricator, points out to Othello, amid the welter

of feminine circumstances, an *association* or appearance, of infidelity. That is the Point of his story—the point of the dagger with which he slays the lovers with their love.

Though the narrator be no villain, he is always the fabricator. Though he may deceive no one, he twists the truth with fantasy. He combines, as we said in Chapter I, the images of reality as they do not in reality appear to the senses.

While the play goes on, we are interested, not in the meaning of *jealousy,* but in the tragic emotions and deeds and words of Othello and Desdemona and Iago.

Such action is its own Point.

II

MODEL 12. *One False Step*

My foot struck something yielding—it was a sleeper's leg; and he turned and groaned, but without waking.

And then, all of a sudden, a shrill voice broke forth out of the darkness:

"Pieces of eight! pieces of eight! pieces of eight! pieces of eight!" and so forth, without pause or change, like the clacking of a tiny mill.

Silver's green parrot, Captain Flint! It was she whom I had heard, pecking at a piece of bark; it was she, keeping better watch than any human being, who had announced my arrival with her wearisome refrain.

I had no time left to me to recover. At the sharp, clipping tone of the parrot, the sleepers awoke and sprang up; and with a mighty oath, the voice of Silver cried:

"Who goes?"

I turned to run, struck violently against one person, recoiled, and ran full into the arms of a second, who, for his part, closed upon and held me tight.

"Bring a torch, Dick," said Silver, when my capture was thus assured.

And one of the men left the log-house and presently returned with a lighted brand.

The red glare of the torch, lighting up the interior of the log-house, showed me the worst of my apprehensions realized. The pirates were in possession of the house and stores: there was the cask of Cognac; there were the pork and bread, as before and, what tenfold increased my horror, not a sign of any prisoner. I could only judge that all had perished, and my heart smote me sorely that I had not been there to perish with them.

STEVENSON, *Treasure Island*

As though his scene were a paragraph, the great story-writer has developed it by a time-honored trick—*cause and effect.* The *cause* is the kicking of a sleeper. The *effect* is the capture. In between, we have every device of the narrator's art:

Imagery.—In all of the paragraphs except the last, the scene is in the dark. No direct mention is made of the time of day; but in the very first paragraph the information is given by omitting the images of sight, and calling upon the tactile, the kinæsthetic, and the auditory. In the last paragraph the torch calls vision into play again. You have seen the same thing done on the stage, when the lights "go up" after a period of darkness and peering. Did you blink a little when you "saw" the torch?

Action.—There are three excellently chosen verbs in the first sentence. Go through the piece, noting other instances. What makes the choice good?—active stimulation of sense?—rousing figurative language?

Conflict.—How is the struggle foreshadowed in the first sentence? What is the alternation that promises to favor Jim? to favor the pirates? Observe that paragraph three and the first half of four provide tension by introducing a brief episode (see Chapter VI, Section II) in which to bring in an auxiliary in a mystifying and therefore interesting manner. Paragraphs five, six, and seven gradually but swiftly turn danger into struggle. Very briefly, number nine offers transition to visual imagery. The Point-Sentence rounds out the whole with a change from imagery to feeling and judgment, but in the same theme. What is the Point-Word? How does it include the preceding events and tend to foreshadow Jim's fate?

Dialogue.—Why is so little *said?* Of what value to the Point or the action are the few speeches that are given? Observe the brief paragraphing. What is your reaction to such an arrangement? Would you favor it for general purposes?

Cause and Effect.—In paragraphs three and four we go from effect to cause. The cry is the effect. Then we learn the source—the parrot.

The major cause and effect may be outlined as follows:

1. Kicking the sleeper.
2. His groan.

3. The parrot's cry.
4. The awakening.
5. Silver's challenge.
6. The attempt to escape.
7. The struggle and capture.
8. Visible evidence of Jim's solitary helplessness in the face of greater peril.

Climax.—The climax follows the line of cause and effect, and is bound up with the conflict. There is a double defeat—physical and spiritual. These constitute the Point, which is the culmination of a series of events associated in similarity, in cause and effect, in increase of intensity, and in complexity of meaning. If the first event of the list given above had not resulted in the second, there would have been the general, simple effect of slight disturbance to a sleeper, instead of the specific, complex capture of Jim by the pirates. As is shown by the chart in Section 1 of this chapter:

Climax is a movement of actions in a series from the less particular, through the more particular, to the most particular.

The climactic Point is not merely the particular of particulars, but in its complexity contains all the other events. These are the *circumstances*—from the Latin *stare,* to stand, and *circum,* about. That is, they are grouped about the Point. In analysis, they may be deduced from the Point. In synthesis, or creative construction, they lead to the Point, as the broader levels of the pyramid lead to the peak.

Exercises

1. Look for scenes of action in stories in the current magazines. Analyze one good and one bad scene for the narrative elements present or lacking. Take notes and keep them in your portfolio.

2. On the basis of your third clipping, and the accompanying lists of images and synonyms, write a single scene to bring out a certain quality in a climactic series of actions.

First determine the Point, and the image and the sentence that are to convey it.

Plot backward, introducing a single conflict, some touches of suspense, and a powerful causal relation between introduction and conclusion.

In the synopsis, make each step, including the introduction, an image of action.

Vary the sense appeal.

Include some dialogue.

Try to write with the vivid economy of the model.

Suggested Readings

Baker, H. T.—*The Contemporary Short Story,* Chapter III.
Esenwein, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story,* Part II, Chapter III.
Phillips, H. A.—*The Plot of the Short Story,* Chapter X.

Chapter XV

PLOT: III, THE PREPARATORY SYNOPSIS

In a Greek drama, such as the *Œdipus Rex,* the Multiple Chronicle is of great importance, since most of the striking events precede the opening scene, and must be inverted into the play by means of reports. But in an Elizabethan drama—*Romeo and Juliet* for example—we have only to know that the Montagues and the Capulets were families in feud. The action is all contemporary to the progress of the scenes—love, marriage, misunderstanding, tragedy. Sophocles worked in a tradition that action was to be reported and not displayed; Shakespeare wrote for an audience that wanted all the wooing and all the warring done before their eyes. Moreover, the interesting events of the *Œdipus* are strung out over a generation, with gaps of time in between; whereas the whole of *Romeo* is but a few days of crowded movement.

Modern narrative, especially in the drama of Ibsen and the poetry of Browning, has gone back to the Attic method. A great many of our story-writers therefore emphasize organic unity—and even tend to employ the Greek unities of time, place, and action—attaining an intensity not usually found in the more leisurely tales written before the nineteenth century. On the other

hand, there are writers like Theodore Dreiser and Edna Ferber who use a chronological structure in order to get the evolution of a human spirit into the small compass of a short story. Even for this form, although in comparatively slight degree, inversion is needed.

If you find that you must place the line of inversion almost at the beginning of your Multiple Chronicle, you have a story of the *Romeo* type; you may almost entirely disregard the background, and plunge into the action. If the opposite be true, then the structure of your story is likely to be a mere framework to be filled in with the scenes and anecdotes of the past. In either case, of course, you find your beginning in that event or scene which allows the freest single line of association leading to the Point. You may have to experiment several times to determine this troublesome matter.

The surest check is a synopsis. Undoubtedly, it is tedious to tell your tale twice, and later in your development you may not need to; but for the present, the synopsis provides good training, and will open your eyes to the problems and possibilities of your art, to your incalculable profit.

Exercises

1. Before you set to work on the Multiple Chronicle you prepared for the exercise in Chapter XIII, write a rough one in analysis of some little story by O. Henry or De Maupassant. Or else sketch the Multiple Chronicle of one of the Sherlock Holmes stories. In the latter case, use the four major headings:

The Motive
The Crime
The Chase
The Detection

and include the characters under these. At any rate, do some technical examining of a masterpiece before you start to work on Exercise 2.

2. Inspect your Multiple Chronicle to see that:

The events make an unbroken sequence in association
The wording is concrete
The outline contains no reduplication

Then write a rough, brief Chronological Synopsis from beginning to end. Do not determine the line of inversion till you have had ample time to be sure of your structure.

Sketch an outline backward from the Point to the line of inversion.

Write the inverted synopsis with very great care. Employ the short sentence. Omit dialogue, but take note of places where you will probably need it. Make your style concrete and simple. Be brief. Five hundred words should be the absolute maximum.

Suggested Readings

My Maiden Effort (published for the Authors' League of America by Doubleday, Page, 1921).

Phillips, H. A.—*The Plot of the Short Story*, Chapter VIII.

Uzzell, Thomas H.—*Narrative Technique*, Part II, Chapter III.

Chapter XVI

THE SCENE WITHOUT DIALOGUE: PANTOMIME

I

The emphasis hitherto placed on the scene, and especially on dialogue, has been merely an expedient. The student of modern narrative must be proficient in this element because modern life is so largely devoted to conversation. In olden times, a whole court would sit in silent attention to the entertainment of a professional story-teller. Since he was himself talking, there was no need that his characters should speak a great deal. The sound of his voice accompanied the action of his tale, as the orchestra of the movie accompanies the images on the screen. The printed page carries no such auditory auxiliary—save indirectly, in dialogue. Furthermore, whereas in ancient days the public was interested primarily in events and very little in character, the situation is in our time reversed; and since a person's nature is often to be found in his speech, modern narrators have gone to the drama and borrowed the scene.

Yet many a story is printed, even to-day, with little dialogue, and some with none. There are plots sufficiently absorbing to dispense with it, or too lengthy to be retarded by it, or cast in the first person, so that the whole account is a monologue. Some of Poe's

works are instances of the last sort; they are narratives told by one of the persons of the action. Since people are more likely to relate events than to repeat talk, it is natural that such narratives should be comparatively unbroken by quotation marks.

There are, in addition, certain authors whose style is so charming, or limpid, or even beautiful, that the reader relishes page after page of delightful text. The company of genius is often to be preferred to that of its creations. Modern instances are Conrad, Galsworthy, Cabell, Hergesheimer, Edith Wharton, Christopher Morley. The language of the great entertainer may still be more royal fare than the small talk of courtiers.

It is therefore possible to write stories with few scenes, or none. Indeed, it is impossible not to include a measure of nonscenic material in any story. The *Dolly Dialogues* of Anthony Hope are an exception; but they constitute a *tour-de-force*, a freak. They are really half playlets,—a unique exhibit, not to be imitated. Even they, however, have sentences and paragraphs of transition and explanation, as dramas have stage directions.

Since narrative form is not by any means entirely scenic, we shall have a series of exercises in some of the other media. The first of these, presented in the present chapter, is the *pantomimic scene*—the scene without dialogue. We begin the series with this type because it affords direct transition from the form we have practiced to other forms quite different. Just

as we drop dialogue in this case, we shall omit, one by one, the other elements of narrative as we go along, until we are dealing with description, argument, exposition, as these latter may find place in the story-writer's art.

II

MODEL 13. *A Pantomimic Scene*

One day my wife followed me upon some household errand into the cellar of the building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting in my wrath the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal, which of course would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded by the interference into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot without a groan.

POE, "The Black Cat"

In a single paragraph, the great raconteur has included every element of his art but dialogue alone. There is not a single spoken word. The murder is committed in a kind of strangled rage. Speech would let down the tone, break the tension.

The act of violent killing involves muscular activity. Note the reliance upon imagery mainly kinæsthetic.

Study the climax. Since the crime is almost an accident, the associations grow from each other unexpectedly. We grasp the sequence, the quality of the

action, only at the end. Would the Point have been equally emphatic if the final sentence had been omitted? How does its inclusion prove the desirability of plain statement as over, letting the reader "figure it out for himself"?

The first three sentences contain many participial phrases, and are otherwise pointedly explanatory. That is because the entire scene is a mere one-paragraph anecdote of the story. But the last three sentences are swift as hammer blows, and full of action and conflict. They leap to a climax and make the selection more than a mere anecdote—a scene.

What is the value of the pantomimic scene as regards economy?

MODEL 14. *Sighting the Great Whale*

Fired by the cry which seemed simultaneously taken up by the three lookouts, the men on deck rushed to the rigging to behold the famous whale they had so long been pursuing. Ahab had now gained his final perch, some feet above the lookouts, Tashtego standing just beneath him on the cap of the top-gallant-mast, so that the Indian's head was almost on a level with Ahab's heel. From this height the whale was seen some mile or so ahead, at every roll of the sea revealing his high, sparkling hump, and regularly jutting his silent spout into the air.

MELVILLE, *Moby Dick*

Dialogue is generally narrowed to earshot. Its omission may have the effect of expanding land- or sea-scapes, with the aspect of description on a large scale. A similar expansion, but applied to time instead

of to space, gives us the chronological unit, which will be discussed in Chapter XVIII. (Note the use of participles in Model 14.)

Exercises

A. *Narrative Style*

Read the stories in some good periodical, looking especially for pantomimic scenes. Is any story made up of them entirely? What, roughly, is the proportion of these to the scenes proper? If the writer relies on pantomime, what reason do you assign for the preference? What sort of images does he employ? Are any of them auditory? Are many of them appeals to the senses less commonly exercised?—taste, smell, etc.? Is the image content high or low in comparison with the abstract? How does vividness vary with the amount and the variety of the imagery? Ask yourself these questions in connection with some good passage from some favorite author. What do you learn about your own reactions? your possible tendencies in writing? Are you given to generalization mainly, or to observation? If you are one-sided, try to train the weakness into a strength.

Read with an analytical eye, and carry the findings of your research over into your writing.

B. *Narrative*

Do at least one of the following:

1. Re-write one of your three scenes in pantomimic form. Note how much the second version resembles a synopsis. What are the merits and defects of each form?
2. Write a pantomimic scene to introduce or to extend one of your three scenes. (Provide a Point for the new member. Supply a brief transition.)

3. Write a pantomimic scene for a story of which one of your three scenes would be another, but not a contiguous part. Employ imagery of the senses less commonly used.

4. Perhaps you have a good clipping you have not used. Select a scene and do it in pantomime.

5. Write a dream, or a real or imagined experience, as a pantomimic scene. (This will be writing from life subjectively.)

6. The next time some one tells you a hard-luck story, or explains his trade to you, or relates a humorous or tragic or humdrum occurrence, select a single scene from the account and develop it by the pantomimic method. (This will be writing from life objectively.)

NOTE: In every case:
The Point and the Point-Sentence
The Outline Backward
The Brief Synopsis Forward
Since you need not bother with dialogue, you should spend more effort in developing the conflict and in varying the imagery to vitalize the action.

Chapter XVII

PLOT: IV, THE OUTLINE BY SCENES

I

The task imposed by this chapter—second in difficulty only to that of the creation of plot—is the dividing of a story into its component scenes. Here again the creative mind stands alone amid the perplexing currents of action, often so baffled by the living thing it creates as to be brought to a dead halt.

As is often the case with inherently difficult things, however, the instructions are few and simple. Nor is the procedure too difficult for one of gifts, after the first, harassing awkwardness. It is like swimming—all agony and gulping to begin with—and then you swim. So the best general advice would seem to be: Plunge in—when you have enough, stop—when you are rested, plunge again!

Remember that you may always alter your plan as you go along. It is yours to keep or to change. If, as you outline the scenes, you find errors or inconsistencies in the synopsis—good! That is the advantage of so much planning; you can control the emergencies in advance, and write finally with a free mind. Furthermore, the need to change a plan is not nearly so desperate as the need to start a manuscript afresh after you have written half of it.

Above all, do not get discouraged. No matter what the difficulty, do not rest till you have conquered it.

II

Read your synopsis through, and determine which is to be your Point-Scene. This, naturally, is the closing one. Half your job is easy. But the closing scene has to begin somewhere, and there's the rub. However, study the last few sentences, or it may be the last few paragraphs, of the synopsis; bracket them, and write in the margin: "Point-Scene." Then lie back in your easy chair, or go out for a solitary stroll, and let the people of your story wander into and out of your fancy until they are saying and doing what they must in order to bring your story to its climax.

You will know when this happens. It is like falling in love, or any other certitude.

Then, at once, seize paper and pencil and outline the scene as you have outlined the single ones of previous exercises: Point-Sentence, backward plan, introductory action, synopsis.

The first fatigue will be merely an illusion. Sit back again. Rest. The details will come—one by one—then a flood—till your thumb numbs in the haste of note taking, and your head swims with clutching for the right word to express your imagery concretely.

This fatigue is real, and dangerous. Burning cheeks are symptoms of no cool thought.

Knock off for the day.

III

What you have written may be depressingly meager and disconnected in the chill dawn of re-reading. That's why you're re-reading, to find the deficiencies. So instead of succumbing to gloom, use your intelligence to salvage your story.

Seek long and earnestly for any indication *that you have planned a great many scenes, instead of just one.* The slightest interval of time, or removal of place, or entrance or exit of characters, or alternation of conflict, may mean that you have a series of scenes. It is a commoner fault of amateurs to lump several together than to pass one half off as the whole. The wearied and excited eagerness to finish, blinds the eye to plain boundary marks.

When you have really isolated the last portion, plan and browse again. But, this time, have an eye open for inversions. They are snags. Consider this, for example:

John, who has secured the pardon, dashes in as the noose is tied.

The clause *who has secured the pardon* is going to give you trouble unless you give it thought. Does it refer to a scene somewhere in the body of the story? Or is the scene to be inverted, in John's explanation after the rescue? How shall the reader know it is John, or that he has a pardon? Are we to see a bold figure dash in on a foam-flecked roan? Is some one on the edge of the crowd to be heard crying: "Reprieve!

Reprieve!" Or is the condemned person to discern the dust cloud far down the road, and call for a wait? Such details are the events of your climax. Until you see them all in sequence and association, you have no Point-Scene at all.

When you do, however, see them, outline the scene so in detail that you can sketch the closing sentences with a fair approximation of their ultimate content.

Do nothing further with this scene. Leave it a little loose, for revision which the other scenes may dictate.

IV

Now return to your synopsis to determine the second scene from the end. Make sure that it is complete, and that no transition is included. If there be a transition to the last scene, merely jot down the gist of it, thus:

Preparation for the execution

and return to the scene on which you are working. Make an outline of it, on a separate sheet, by the usual method. In the same way, determine and outline all the earlier scenes, one by one, till you come to the introduction. Keep one eye on the Point, and the other on plausibility.

The opening scene, or section, should be taken slowly and carefully, at a separate session. It must contain such information as is required to forecast the Point in a general way, but it must stir with action and conflict, so that the reader's interest may be aroused

at once. Do not start too far back. Inversion is not uninteresting, especially if it be given in the words of the characters, so that the reader can "get acquainted."

Gather your sheets in order and put them away for a day or two. Take your time in revising. Even glaring inconsistencies have a way of defying alteration for a while.

Do not re-write in final form while a single scene remains blank, or a single link of sequence is lacking, or an overloaded scene needs trimming.

The skeleton of your plan should be as follows:

Title

Scene I
  A. ..... (Major Event)
  B. .....
  C., D., E., etc.
  Point-Sentence.
Transition
Scene II
  A. etc.

In the final draft of the plan, guard against vagueness by changing abstract terms to concrete images.

Exercises

1. Outline a story in some book or magazine, roughly, by scenes and transitions, according to the instructions given above.

2. Convert your synopsis into an outline by scenes and transitions.

Chapter XVIII

NARRATIVE FORMS OTHER THAN THE SCENE

I

Anecdotes have many forms, but the distinguishing mark is that the whole narrative is reduced to its Point, or very nearly. The reason is that an anecdote almost always serves to illustrate some larger and more general theme, even in conversation; and the additional humorous or witty touch sometimes associated with this smallest unit of narrative makes Pointedness the heart of brevity, as brevity is the soul of wit.

It is for this reason that fables are proverbially short. Though every anecdote is not a fable, every fable is an anecdote; and the unicellular structure of most fables arises naturally from the necessity of one person to convince the other out of hand. Thus, a father wishing to impress a son with the need of conservatism might embroider his argument with the classic instance of the Hare and the Tortoise; while the son, unduly lectured, might recite the epigrammatic conversation of the two Crabs. As a matter of fact, people rarely poke fables at each other. What they do, is to drive home the same Points by illustrating from their own or others' experience, or by fabricating hypothetical instances.

This, if it be not the same as the substitution of imagery of our first and earliest exercise, is so closely akin as to reveal the fundamental principle of all narration—a creation of images from, and a relation of images to, some Point.

The connection with professional fiction is that the story-writer, wishing to exemplify the trait of a character or of a locale, may toss off an anecdote to re-inforce his topic. For instance, to indicate the peril from tigers in an Indian village, he will tell briefly an incident in which a raid from the jungle resulted in the disappearance of two children. He will then add that since that terrible evening, all children have been kept indoors at dusk, and that the fires have been piled higher. The same device may be employed to make concrete a statement concerning a social group, or concerning the hero or some other character. The two determinants are Pointedness and brevity, for exposition and swift movement. As we have seen from our fables, the anecdote may be the molecule of narrative, in the sense of containing all the elements, but this need not be so. The main thing is to write with a style so lean that the Point shows through like a thin man's elbow.

MODEL 15. *Madame Oreille's Thrift*

Madame Oreille was economical. She knew the exact value of a centime and possessed a perfect bone-yard of strict adages upon the multiplication of money. Her servant certainly had no easy task to secure her perquisites, and Monsieur Oreille was hard put to it to get his pocket

money. They were comfortably off, however, since they had no children. Yet Madame Oreille suffered real physical pain when she had to let go of the good crown-pieces. It was like a tearing at her heart. Whenever she was compelled to spend a large sum, even for something important, she slept badly the next night.

Oreille was forever saying:

"You really might be more generous. We don't use up our income, and we have no children."

"You can't tell what may happen," she always replied. "Better to have too much than not enough."

DE MAUPASSANT, "The Umbrella"

The great French story-writer is proverbially a master of concision. Indeed, he is practically matchless in economy, and his works abound in such passages as the above. Where another would have developed the main trait of a central character into a lengthy description or a complete scene, he provides a topic statement, a handful of specific instances, and an anecdote in four lines of dialogue.

Note that the anecdote is merely an instance expanded, and that the instances are images of the topic, which is re-stated in the Point. Note likewise how the use of conflict makes the central image a living force.

MODEL 16. *Community in Anglo-India*

Globe trotters who expect entertainment as a right, have, even within my memory, blunted this open-heartedness, but none the less to-day, if you belong to the Inner Circle, and are neither a Bear nor a Black Sheep, all houses are open to you and our small world is very kind and helpful.

Rickett of Kamartha stayed with Polder of Kumaon some

fifteen years ago. He meant to stay two nights, but was knocked down by rheumatic fever, and for six weeks disorganized Polder's establishment, stopped Polder's work, and nearly died in Polder's bedroom. Polder behaves as though he had been placed under eternal obligation by Rickett, and yearly sends the little Ricketts a box of presents and toys. It is the same everywhere. The men who do not take the trouble to conceal from you the opinion that you are an incompetent ass . . . will work themselves to the bone in your behalf if you fall sick or into serious trouble.

KIPLING, "The Phantom 'Rickshaw"

Here the Point is the trait of a group instead of an individual; but the anecdote is still in terms of the specific instance. Note how the Point is emphasized.

MODEL 17. *The Blinding of the Black Cat*

But my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like alcohol—and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish—even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill-temper.

One night, returning much intoxicated from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him, when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed at once to take flight from my body, and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fiber of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket. I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

POE, "The Black Cat"

Like Model 13, Chapter XVI, this selection is at once an anecdote and a pantomimic scene. Poe, wizard of structure that he is, introduces his explanations directly into the stream of action. There is no interruption, or relaxation of interest, and the tension is screwed to the snapping point.

Observe that in the second paragraph, beginning with the third sentence, there is a break in the imagery to admit three brief sentences of generalized introspection. These serve alike to soften the horrible climax by preparing a gradual way for it; and to re-double the horror at the resumption of imagery. As in Model 13, the absence of dialogue and the stress upon the kinæsthetic and the organic, present a remarkably vivid effect of speechless rage. As is always the case in Poe's work, the Point is plainly foreshadowed in the beginning, and clearly stated in the end. Here, indeed, the Point-Word is the last.

II

Closely related to the anecdote in the function of exemplifying a statement, but differing in length and diffuseness, is a unit to which, for convenience, we shall give the name of *typical instance*. This is a series of events and comments of no special structure, but strongly marked throughout by some such Point as a trait of character, an habitual action, or a social custom.

MODEL 18. *A Gilded Idler*

His full name was Don Dino d'Idria. He is the youngest son of a titled, vain, impoverished Tuscan family. Of

course he has never done a stroke of work in his life. At eleven o'clock in the morning he rises, reads a little d'Annunzio, De Maupassant or something like that, arrays himself like the lilies, and saunters forth to brighten the streets. In the afternoon he supports the façade of the nobles' club in the Via Tornabuoni, resting himself from time to time by sitting down in Doney's or Giacosa's. At the hour of the promenade he is likely to take some exercise in Cascine Park, reclining on the small of his back in a cab, and bowing to left and right. As for the evening, to spend it with him is to draw a lottery-ticket from the hat of Fate.

STEPHEN FRENCH WHITMAN, "One of Those Nice Little Evenings"

The effect is description, exemplification, but the procedure is narrative: a series of events associated as types of the Point—irresponsibility.

MODEL 19. *Fishermen Friends*

. . . before the war Morissot had been in the habit of starting out at dawn every Sunday, rod in hand, and a tin box on his back. He would take the train to Argenteuil, get out at Colombes, then go on foot as far as the Island of Marante. The moment he reached this elysium of his dreams he would begin to fish, and fish till night. Every Sunday he met there a little round and jovial man, M. Sauvage, a haberdasher of Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, also a perfect fanatic at fishing. They would often pass half the day side by side, rod in hand, feet dangling above the stream, and in this manner had become fast friends. Some days they did not talk, other days they did. But they understood each other admirably, for their tastes and feelings were identical.

DE MAUPASSANT, "The Friends"

III

A series of events, with comparatively long intervals between any two of them, but associated on the basis of the continuity of some action or conflict over a period of time, shall in these exercises be known as a *chronological unit*. Although the Point may be an emotion or a trait, it is usually no more than a certain quality in the action itself.

This element is much used in introductions, to give a thumbnail biography. It is also employed, as one might readily expect, in inversions: a character thus tells the story of his life or that of another, or explains some act, or failure to act, during a period while he has been out of the story.

MODEL 20. *Epilogue of Moby Dick*

And I only am escaped alone to tell thee—*Job*

The drama's done. Why then here does any one step forth?—Because one did survive the wreck.

It so chanced, that after the Parsee's disappearance, I was he whom the fates ordained to take the place of Ahab's bowsman, when that bowsman assumed the vacant post; the same, who, when on the last day the three men were tossed from out the rocky boat, was dropped astern. So floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it, when the half-spent suction of the sunk ship reached me, I was then, but slowly, drawn toward the closing vortex. When I reached it, it had subsided to a creamy pool. Round and round, then, and ever contracting toward the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that vital center, the black bubble did upward

burst and now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirge-like main. The unharming sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks. On the second day a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious cruising *Rachel,* that in her search after her missing children, only found another orphan.

MELVILLE, *Moby Dick*

The selection contains, in pantomime, one scene developed fully, and several others summarized in their important imagery. There are intervals of time (indicated by transitional phrases, such as *on the second day*) but there is nevertheless a unity of sequence arising from the association of the events in their Point—*the sole survivor.* This is connoted in the concluding phrase: *only found another orphan.*

The great advantage of the chronological unit is that it embraces long stretches of time within the sweep of a single action, and with economy. Had Melville written the conclusion of his masterpiece in any greater detail, or perhaps as a series of scenes, the result would have been tedium. He appraised these few closing events according to the standard of the thrilling scenes that had gone before, and rightly compressed the ending into one long paragraph. Even within the epilogue he apportioned the details in accordance with the importance of the occurrence, and tapered the units off,

making them briefer and briefer, till he reached his Point.

(This stretching of action over periods of time is similar to the embracing of large spaces in Model 14, Chapter XVI, likewise selected from *Moby Dick*. Such treatment is in accord with the spirit of sea stories, and stories of adventure generally, where the interest arises from crowded action, regardless of time and space. See the *Arabian Nights,* and novels by Scott, Cooper, Marryat, Lever, and Stevenson.)

Model 21. *The Slave Captain*

Captain Ledoux was a born sailor. He had started at the bottom and worked his way up to the rank of assistant quartermaster. At the battle of Trafalgar his left hand was so severely damaged by splinters of wood that he had to have it amputated, and consequently he received his discharge, with first-rate testimonials. The quiet monotony of home life was distasteful to him, and, when he was offered the post of second lieutenant on board a corsair, he eagerly seized the opportunity of going to sea again. The money which came to him as his share of a few captures enabled him to buy books and to study the theory of navigation as a supplement to the practical knowledge he already possessed. In due time he became captain of a pirate lugger which could boast of three guns and a crew of sixty dauntless sailors: the longshoremen of Jersey still remember the exploits of this pirate lugger. Then came the peace, which was a great grief to him; he had amassed a considerable amount of money during the war and had looked forward to increase his little fortune at the expense of the English. But he was obliged to offer his services to peaceful merchants and, as he was known to be a man of courage and experience, he had no difficulty in finding a

ship. When slave trading was prohibited by law, it could not be undertaken without running great risks, for it was necessary not only to evade the watchfulness of the French Customs officers (which was not so very difficult) but also to escape being captured by English cruisers. Captain Ledoux proved invaluable to these "ebony" merchants.

MÉRIMÉE, "Tamango"

This is the opening paragraph of a rousing story of the African slave trade. The author lifts his method of approach bodily from historical and biographical style. The procedure is entirely natural, since he is dealing with a period of economic history, and must introduce the appropriate background. He interweaves this information with a pretended biography of his villain, in such a way, and with such emphasis upon the villainy, as to lead directly to the action proper. There is a veiled irony throughout; it comes into prominence in the last sentence, and screws down the Point.

MODEL 22. *Mrs. Amp Triumphs*

Then, one day, when Lady Surplice was at the height of her success, Mrs. Amp fell on Europe. Nay, said Dwight-Rankin, Mrs. Amp obliterated Europe. Without Mr. Amp, but with Mr. Amp's millions. Mrs. Amp, said Dwight-Rankin, was a large woman: a very large woman: and hearty. Her face was not that of Aphrodite: her figure not that of Mrs. Vernon Castle: but she had, said Dwight-Rankin, a certain charm. Her descent on Europe was catastrophic. And Europe loved it. She laid one hand on London and one on Paris, threw Venice over one shoulder and hung Deauville around her neck, and people just fell on to her lap. And what a lap, said Dwight-Rankin. However . . .

For days and days people went about saying: "I say, what's all this about a Mrs. Amp? Who is Mrs. Amp? What?" Then for days and days people went about saying: "Have you met Mrs. Amp? The devil, what a woman! These Americans! What?" Then for days and days people went about saying: "Are you dining with Mrs. Amp to-night? Am I? Good Lord, no! Why should one dine with Mrs. Amp? What?" Then for ever and ever people went about saying: "I'm sorry, but I must be going now. I am dining with Mrs. Amp to-night. What? Oh, you are too? Good, we'll meet over dinner!"

MICHAEL ARLEN, "Farewell, These Charming People," from *Mayfair*

Here, again, we are introduced to a character. The method is inversion, in an account which a minor personage renders ostensibly to the author. There is interwoven a texture of what is usually capitalized as Society. Its exaggerations, its idle, impertinent chat, its silly repetitiveness are all caught in a mesh of irony, especially in the dialogue. The flippancy of the Georgian style covers the fact that the action is temporarily halted to admit descriptive material. Other writers who love to burlesque their puppets in such chronological units are George Ade, Carl Van Vechten, and O. Henry.

EXERCISES

1. Find and analyze examples of anecdote, typical instance, and chronological unit, in the current magazines, or in your favorite writer of fiction.

2. Write, for each of the three forms, a bit of narrative in connection with a theme you have already written; or on the basis of new material gleaned from clippings, experience, or fancy; or in connection with the story you are planning by scenes.

Chapter XIX

PLOT: V, THE CLIMACTIC SCENE; TYPES OF ACTION

We have often referred to the "mind" of the writer or the reader, as though the reactions of the two were identical. Such, of course, is not the case. Between composing and reading lies all the difference that distinguishes creation from experience, work from pleasure.

In no connection is this truer than in that of action. To the layman it means—vaguely—the steps by which a tale moves to a climax. To the artist it means this, and much beside. He cannot concentrate merely on his satisfaction with his own words. He must consider their effect—nay, all their possible effects—upon the invisible public for which he, within his closed and quiet study, is supplying the stimuli of a later recreation of his fantasy. He must concentrate, therefore, not merely on his very words, but more importantly on the responses they will arouse in many heads, when he is not present to correct error or adjust ambiguity.

After all, writing is in one sense only black marks on white paper. To an Eskimo, it means nothing. Without some one to read it, a book is just so much matter—some sheets of converted rag, infinitesimally weighted with the chemicals of printers' ink. Even when the reader's eye falls upon the page, the print is

no more than the focal point between him and you. Thus we have the eternal triangle of composition—writer, symbol, reader. Once the words pass out of your hands, they may experience no change. Such effect as they are to have, they will have. All alterations from rough draft to final must be made before this release. In the process of composing you must change, not merely words, but ideas, and even yourself, to make sure that the unknown at the other end will "focus" properly. Once he does this, then your symbols begin to change *him*. He may have been complacently digesting his dinner and planning his vacation before he took up your story—but after the first few paragraphs you have set him to climbing mountain trails, or playing the stock market, or making love, in imitation of your puppets. His senses re-create your fantasies as they are expressed in the symbols of your imagery.

Action, in its most general sense, is this process of guiding and influencing the mind of the reader to re-create certain associations selected from the consciousness of the writer. If you write a winter story, the other man should feel cold, and see snow, and exhale steamy breath—in fancy. That is to say, he should recall how he acted and felt in real cold, but, without realizing it, perhaps, *apply his experience to your characters.* He should see them stamping their shoes free of snow, or rubbing their numb fingers. In other words, he should have before his senses constantly a panorama of the images you stimulate in his organs of sense. This action of the senses, for want of a more

inclusive term, we shall call *spectacle;* and by spectacle we shall mean the sum total of the experienced imagery; not merely of the eyes, but of all the senses.

We can see at once that, in narration, spectacle is the form of action from which all others arise. It is not, however, the whole of action. Spectacle, for instance, is often intended to arouse the feelings; and so *emotion* must be included as an element in action. In addition to the stirring of feeling, there is the sense of feelings in *conflict.* You, for your part, may see a glorious battle waging. Yet if your words are poorly chosen or badly arranged, the reader will fall asleep over tedious lines of print. If you select the images with a view to their effect, he will sit up and grip the book with excitement. You have moved him to battle and its excitement.

When you come to the end of your story, or to the end of any section of it, and your expression leads to a Point other than the one you wish to convey, you are giving the public a basis of incorrect *judgment,* or *reason.* Either of these is action, for the lay mind should be urged to certain conclusions by what you say. Sometimes the whole point of a dialogue is that the reader should be led to say to himself: "This character is in the wrong. I hope he loses." If you do not bring about this judgment, your story may fail completely.

Nay, there are times when you must move the reader to do no more than try to think! In the midst of conflict he should anxiously grope for the outcome, yet

without picturing it. Will the hero win? Will the heroine understand how she has misjudged him? Will the hostile parents be reconciled to the elopement? And —how? Similarly, and in greater degree, the detective story stimulates this mental groping toward the outcome. Who committed the crime? How? Why? How is the criminal going to be apprehended? You yourself have had such reactions dozens of times. Perhaps you have even solved the mystery in advance of the explanation! Such forward-looking interest we shall call *anticipation;* and the writer who can wake that eagerness is a master of the subtlest form of action in the category.

The reverse of anticipation, of course, is *inversion.* It is the paradox of action, for by its means *we remember the lives of other men, whom we do not know!* All narrative has been called "vicarious experience"; that is, experience gained by reading of the experience of others. Then inversion is vicarious memory! It moves us to delve into some imaginary past for events which illuminate some equally imagined present.

The last form of action is the hardest of all to explain, to understand, to appreciate. It is *harmony,* the sense of the fitting of the parts into the whole; of the smooth transition of part into part; of the agreement of feelings, judgments, colors, sounds, shapes; of the gentle modulation or the exciting leap of the very phrases and words. It is rhetoric in structure, style in wording, beauty in the whole joy of gifts and art. It is to the story what the orchestra is to the opera,

what the swing of the bat is to the fine hit, what the glide of the canoe is to its swift progress. Rough tales have satisfied crude minds. But in the fraternity of the lovers of the beautiful, harmony is the resolution of all actions, moving us to relish, with the matter, the artist's manner of presenting it. It is the soul of composition, making the dead symbols live.

When you write—and for the present, especially, when you write the exercise for this chapter—believe yourself the creative artist. Believe this, not for the swelling of your head, but for its employment. At every turn, try to picture your reader. Work cannily to make your spectacle his, and the emotion, and the conflict. Do not merely "pour yourself out." Rather be guided to press the buttons and throw the switches of another consciousness, until you bring into action, there, the mechanisms of judgment, of anticipation, of memory from inversion, and of harmony from a style and structure, if not beautiful, then at least orderly and consistent.

This is the complex task and the high distinction of the creator of action.

Exercises

1. Read the closing scenes of several contemporary and classic stories, analyzing for the types of action set forth above.
2. Write a rough draft of the Point-Scene of your story.

Suggested Readings

Bennett, Arnold—*The Old Wives' Tale.* Read the introduction.

De Maupassant, Guy—*Pierre et Jean.* Read the introduction.

Stevenson, Robert Louis—*Treasure Island.* Read the introduction.

Chapter XX

DESCRIPTION, EXPOSITION, AND ARGUMENT IN NARRATIVE

I

A SCIENTIST, relating a process performed in his laboratory, uses narrative. He presents a series of events governed by whatever Point he has in mind: what ingredients or instruments he used, how and in what order he applied them, in what result the experiment terminated. He may be explaining a new method of manufacturing sulphuric acid, or in other fields, the course of a star, the origins of chalk, or the habits of certain birds. In any case, along with his conjecturing and his reasoning, he often narrates. One of the differences between such narration and fiction is that in the former the events are typical of many phenomena; whereas in the latter they may be narrowed specifically to one central fantasy—the adventures of Tom Jones, or Robinson Crusoe, or Cedric the Saxon. You can see now why the chronological unit of Chapter XVIII is related to the sciences of biography and history. Exposition is by its nature as general and typical as fiction is concrete and specific; but when the expositor employs narration he employs the same underlying principles as does the novelist.

So, too, is narrative often to be found in description. We ourselves have used our art for the purpose of

portraying a character, or revealing an emotion. As for argumentation, every stump-speaker and debater, for purposes of conviction, narrates—in anecdotes, in reported scenes, and in chronological units of the history of a movement or a condition of affairs.

Narrative, on the other hand, makes equal use of exposition, description, and argument. The present chapter is devoted to such practice.

II

MODEL 23. *The Inquest*

By the light of a tallow candle which had been placed on one end of a rough table a man was reading something written in a book. It was an old account book, greatly worn; and the writing was not, apparently, very legible, for the man sometimes held the page close to the flame of the candle to get a stronger light on it. The shadow of the book would then throw into obscurity a half of the room, darkening a number of faces and figures; for besides the reader, eight other men were present. Seven of them sat against the rough log walls, silent, motionless, and the room being small, not very far from the rough table. By extending an arm any one of them could have touched the eighth man, who lay on the table, face upward, partly covered by a sheet, his arms at his sides. He was dead.

BIERCE, "The Damned Thing"

The images are startlingly like life. There is the merest touch of conflict between the candle-flame and the shadow of the book. The narrowing process of association from the walls of the room to the center, where lies the corpse, is similar to climax.

Yet this is not narrative, however artfully it may be dressed as such. There is *no sequence of events.* There is no unifying conflict. There is little action, and that disjointed. Therefore there is no narrative climax. What we have really is description—a setting, as when the curtain rises on a dark stage, with a cunning shifting of light that reveals one object after the other until it discloses the central one, and presses the spring of action. In this sort of introduction, and in his ability to draw even non-narrative elements into the direct current of action, Ambrose Bierce is one of the masters of the short story. If you can disguise your description as narrative in this fashion, you have the gift, the spark. Try it, and see.

Model 24. *The Loop-Hound*

Jo Hertz was a loop-hound. On the occasion of those sparse first nights granted the metropolis of the Middle West he was always present, third row, aisle, left. When a new loop café was opened, Jo's table always commanded an unobstructed view of anything worth viewing. On entering he was wont to say, "Hello, Gus," with careless cordiality to the head-waiter, the while his eye roved from table to table as he removed his gloves. He ordered things under glass, so that his table, at midnight or thereabouts, resembled a hot-bed that favors the bell system. The waiters fought for him. He was the kind of man who mixes his own salad dressing. He liked to call for a bowl, some cracked ice, lemon, garlic, paprica, salt, pepper, vinegar and oil, and make a rite of it. People at near-by tables would lay down their knives and forks to watch, fascinated. The secret of it seemed to lie in using all the oil in sight and calling for more.

That was Jo—a plump and lonely bachelor of fifty. A plethoric roving-eyed and kindly man, clutching vainly at the garments of a youth that had long slipped past him. Jo Hertz, in one of those pinch-waist belted suits and a trench coat and a little green hat, walking up Michigan Avenue of a bright winter's afternoon, trying to take the curb with a jaunty youthfulness against which every one of his fat-encased muscles rebelled, was a sight for mirth or pity, depending on one's vision.

EDNA FERBER, "The Gay Old Dog"

From the point of view of narrative gifts, the great triumph of "The Gay Old Dog" was the discovery of Jo Hertz as possible material for sympathetic, even emotional treatment. Therein lies the secret of Miss Ferber's power—the insight which discovers the heart of a character before it turns itself into observation of the features, the traits, the habitual actions. She converts her feeling for the individual into semi-impersonal reporting of his appearance, deeds, and mannerisms. The imagery she uses is therefore not only motivated by a sane sympathy, but sharpened by a sense of true values. The person is not merely picturable. He lives. Those who have flattered this gifted woman by the imitation of her expression alone, have profited from the model of a lively style without producing her semblance of life, without equaling her freedom from bathos.

The passage is not narrative, but description, for the same reasons given in connection with Model 23. Yet observe that though description does not associate its imagery in a sequence of events, it nevertheless employs

both events and images, and succeeds in measure as these are selected for their specific Pointedness and expressed in terms that are fresh, and varied in appeal, and vivid.

III

One of the delights of *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Swiss Family Robinson* is bound up in the explanations of how to do things—salvage a cargo, build a hut, make clothes out of skins, make a boat out of a hollowed tree-trunk. That these expositions are given as the experience of a particular person or group, heightens the interest in practical craftsmanship. We feel that what one man has done, we too might accomplish. When a great detective wishes to make clear how he solved the mystery of the blood stains or the peculiar poisons, we are willing to listen to a brief lecture on chemistry, if it is put in terms we can grasp. But of all trades and sciences, it is psychology whose expositions please us most. Turn back to *Silas Marner,* and open to the passage where the weaver is evolving into a miser, or where Godfrey and Dunstan are quarreling over Wildfire. The incidental paragraphs of exposition are masterpieces of observation and analysis. Not even John Stuart Mill could have wielded the scalpel or the pen with a surer incisiveness than did the Victorian seeress of human motive.

Often, in your stories, you will be forced to deal with technical matter for the realism of your setting or the clarification of your action. The ability to introduce

a paragraph or two on banking, welding, forestry, syncopation, or the forward pass, at a moment when the tale requires "local color," is one of the indispensable instruments of the story-writer. Sometimes, as in George Eliot, exposition occurs in narrative in its own shape and substance. Sometimes, as in Poe, the lesson is woven into an anecdote or a pantomimic scene. De Maupassant gives a typical instance, and proceeds thriftily to his Point with a minimum of dissertation. Shaw merely creates a fascinating scene, and leaves it to you to bind the inferences of the dialogue into a social philosophy,—which you may find in the preface. The modern psychological or sociological or economic novelist turns his theories to images and sets them clashing in mimicry of the phenomena he sees everywhere about him,—witness Galsworthy, or Dreiser, or May Sinclair, or H. G. Wells, or Sinclair Lewis.

MODEL 25. *Sharks*

Yet the voice spake true; for scarce had we pushed from the ship, when numbers of sharks, seemingly rising from out the dark waters beside the hull, maliciously snapped at the blades of the oars, every time they dipped in the water; and in this way accompanied the boats with their bites. *It is a thing not uncommonly happening to the whale-boats in those swarming seas; the sharks at times apparently following them in the same prescient way that vultures hover over the banners of marching regiments in the east.* But these were the first sharks that had been observed by the *Pequod* since the white whale had been first descried; *and whether it was that Ahab's crew were all such tiger-yellow barbarians, and therefore their flesh*

more musky to the sense of the sharks—a matter sometimes well known to affect them—however it was, they seemed to follow that one boat without molesting the others.

MELVILLE, *Moby Dick*

The italicized portions are bald exposition; the rest, narrative sugar-coating of exposition. Note the change from concrete to abstract, particular to general, especially near the end.

Modern writers, such as Conrad, dealing with the same sort of material of little-known animal or vegetable life, often prefer to treat the matter concretely throughout, giving the necessary information in the words or the observation of their personages. A group of people, for instance, travel through the jungle, noting or mentioning certain phenomena apparently at random. Yet the things they observe are carefully selected by the author, to anticipate some need of subsequent action, or merely for description and setting. Hence there may be no set or formal exposition. It is chopped fine, in the form of strange words, or the names of exotic things, and sprinkled hither and yon, among the events of the march or the paddle. There is a touch of this technique in the first sentence of the present model, where we learn that sharks are bold enough to come up right under the hull of a boat, and bite at the oars. The difficulty of such interweaving is great. It requires patience and practice. But it is often superior to the blunt lecturing of the italicized portions of Model 25.

MODEL 26. *One Duty of the Mate*

Mr. Baker, chief mate of the ship "Narcissus," stepped in one stride out of his lighted cabin into the darkness of the quarterdeck. Above his head, on the break of the poop, the night-watchman rang a double stroke. It was nine o'clock. Mr. Baker, speaking up to the man above him, asked: "Are all the hands aboard, Knowles?"

The man limped down the ladder, then said reflectively: "I think so, sir. All our old chaps are here, and a lot of new men has come. . . . They must all be there."

"Tell the boatswain to send all hands aft," went on Mr. Baker; "and tell one of the youngsters to bring a good lamp here. I want to muster our crowd."

CONRAD, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*

These opening paragraphs of the famous novel happen to be narrative. Yet they contain information about a ship. Some of it may be a little beyond a landlubber, because the text gives only a mention, without definition. What, for example, is the poop? Where is the quarter-deck? In which direction does one go aft? On the other hand, we do learn, quite clearly: that one of the duties of the chief mate is to keep track of the crew; that he may call the watchman or the boatswain from his duties to do his bidding; that two bells means nine o'clock; that sailors are called "hands," and that to muster them is to call them into assembly.

We make these inferences as we read, without ceasing to follow the story.

MODEL 27. *"Knowability" in India*

One of the few advantages that India has over England is a certain great Knowability. After five years'

service a man is directly or indirectly acquainted with two or three hundred Civilians in his province, all the messes of ten or twelve Regiments and Batteries, and some fifteen hundred other people of non-official castes. In ten years his knowledge should be doubled, and at end of twenty he knows, or knows something about, every Englishman in the Empire, and may travel anywhere and everywhere without paying hotel bills.

KIPLING, "The Phantom 'Rickshaw"

Kipling "discovered" India for fiction. He was therefore under frequent necessity to descant upon peculiar customs as well as to picture strange scenes. This initial paragraph of one of his best-known stories serves to transport the reader thousands of miles, and to introduce him to an alien land. (Model 16, Chapter XVIII, is a direct continuation of the above, and contains an anecdote that makes the exposition concrete.) Now that India is familiar to us all, a contemporary writer wishing to set a story there might not need to open it in this essay fashion, but might employ the mixed method of Model 26.

MODEL 28. *The Minister's Trickery*

"I mean to say," continued Dupin, . . . "that if the minister had been no more than a mathematician, the Prefect would have been under no necessity of giving me this cheque. I knew him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold *intrigant*. Such a man, I considered, could not have failed to be aware of the ordinary policial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate—and

events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate—the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as *ruses,* to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction to which G——, in fact, did finally arrive—the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I felt, also, that the whole train of thought which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed—I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary *nooks* of concealment. *He* could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets, to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to *simplicity,* if not induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so *very* self-evident. . . .

"There is a game of puzzles . . . which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word—the name of town, river, state, or empire—any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names, but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart

to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious. . . . But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it. . . ."

POE, "The Purloined Letter"

After winning the reward for restoring the stolen missive, Dupin, the first of the great detectives of modern fiction, sits back to tell a friend just how he did it. One of the segments of his exposition is the above selection. The whole thing should be read, analyzed, and enjoyed, not merely for the ingenuity of the action, but also for the clearness and smoothness with which the intricacy is expressed.

The inversions in the first paragraph are only one instance of the great American's skill in making every bit of his writing—even the exposition—a part of the action and the plot. Likewise, inversion is here employed as a *review,* so that the thesis is made clearer by repetition of the events which lead naturally to Dupin's inferences.

It is almost painfully obvious to refer the student, for more of the same sort of expository theorizing, to Conan Doyle, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Anna Katherine Greene, and Carolyn Wells.

Note the use of anecdote in the second paragraph, and of typical instance in the first.

IV

Poe had to do more than explain why the minister left the precious letter in an open rack in his office; he had to convince the reader that a certain type of man would take such a risk. If you will read Model 28 again, you will see that both narrative and expository instruments are wielded by argument. Dupin wants his listener (who is removed but once from the reader) to believe that such a minister would resort to such a scheme. The passage is almost a plea for credence.

Argument is that form of expression by which the speaker attempts to establish in the mind of the listener such an association of ideas as to bring the latter into agreement with him, or to keep him more securely in agreement. Argument and narration may thus be alike in re-arranging the functions of the attentive mind. Narrative, however, is satisfied to produce there a pattern of images involved in some specific fantasy. Argument tends to influence impulse to certain actions, toward which imagery is incidental exemplification or incitement. The target is the other man's will—his partisanship, his accord, his belief.

MODEL 29. *Solids May Be Invisible*

[Extract from the journal of a man attacked by an invisible beast.]

"It is known to seamen that a school of whales basking or sporting on the surface of the ocean, miles apart, with the convexity of the earth between, will sometimes dive at the same instant—all gone out of sight in a moment. The signal has been sounded—too grave for the ear of

the sailor at the masthead and his comrade on the deck—who nevertheless feel its vibrations in the ship as the stones of a cathedral are stirred by the bass of the organ.

"As with sounds, so with colors. At each end of the solar spectrum the chemist can detect the presence of what are known as 'actinic' rays. They represent colors—integral colors in the composition of light—which we are unable to discern. The human eye is an imperfect instrument; its range is but a few octaves of the real 'chromatic scale.' I am not mad; there are colors that we cannot see.

"And, God help me, the Damned Thing is of such a color!"

BIERCE, "The Damned Thing"

There is some narrative in the first paragraph, and much exposition throughout. Mainly, however, the excerpt is an argument, a plea to the reader that because the sense of hearing is incapable of catching certain hypothetical sounds, and sight of catching certain hypothetical colors,—he is to believe that a beast may be solid, but invisible! The fact that the logic is specious does not destroy the effectiveness of the plea, so far as most readers are concerned. This sort of trickery is often resorted to, Barnum-wise, in "explaining" ghostly phenomena. Why not? There's fun in a circus, even though the freaks may be spurious, so long as we are successfully deluded.

Sometimes whole scenes are devoted to argument—to winning the reader over to a cause. The so-called *problem* novel or play (also labeled *thesis*) is made almost entirely of such scenes. In the drama we have Ibsen's *Doll's House,* Shaw's *Back to Methuselah,* and

Galsworthy's *Justice,* to mention but a few. Among novels, there are Dickens' *Hard Times,* Reade's *Hard Cash,* Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga,* and Lewis' *Main Street,* and many more by the same and other authors.

Some others go so far as to let their characters argue a point, or they even plead with the reader directly. Fielding, in *Tom Jones,* has two scholars debate the matter of the hero's education throughout the book. In *War and Peace* Tolstoy carries his pacifism straight to the public in many direct pleas. In almost every one of his novels, Dickens has an ax to grind against some bad law or social injustice—poverty, harmful schools, impossible divorce laws, debtors' prisons, and the whole system of chancery.

As to the method of employing narrative to attack an opponent or to destroy evil—that is older than the parables in the Bible.

Exercises

A. *Narrative Style*

Analyze a contemporary or a classic narrative for instances of exposition, description, and argumentation in connection or in combination with narrative.

B. *Narrative*

Do one of the following:

1. If there be occasion, write a portion of the story you are planning, as description, exposition, argument.

2. If not, perform the same task on the basis of previous work, or clippings, or other real or imagined experiences.

Suggested Readings

Baldwin, C. S.—*College Composition* (Longmans, 1922), Parts I–III.

———, *Composition Oral and Written* (Longmans, 1922,), Chapters I–IV.

Clark, Glenn—*A Manual of the Short Story Art,* Part I, Chapters I–IV.

Note: See the current magazines for stories of industrial or commercial type. Analyze them for non-narrative content. For the same sort of thing, done in good style, re-read one of the following: "Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Irving; one or two of *The De Coverley Papers,* Addison; a suitable chapter of *Gulliver's Travels,* Swift; or of *The Citizen of the World,* Goldsmith.

Chapter XXI

PLOT: VI, THE INTRODUCTION

I

THE scene, for the amateur, makes a very good introduction. It presents the main characters directly, or by reference of other personages; it incites the action and perhaps the conflict, at once. Though few stories begin with quotation marks, perhaps because speech is a bit abrupt for a commencement, nevertheless the early appearance of dialogue is a good lure to interest.

However, where the story is cast in a locale or amid circumstances of which the reader is probably ignorant, it may be advisable to employ treatment not scenic. Mérimée's "Tamango" (see Model 21, Chapter XVIII) involves a knowledge of the slave trade, so the opening is devoted to a chronological unit giving the biography of a slave-captain. Kipling's "Phantom 'Rickshaw" (Model 16, Chapter XVIII, and Model 27, Chapter XX) is a tale of India; so there is a brief essay on Anglo-Indian "knowability" to start with. "The Umbrella," by De Maupassant (Model 15, Chapter XVIII) commences with a typical instance, including an anecdote, of Madame Corbeille's niggardliness. Ambrose Bierce prepares for a discussion of the supernatural by opening with the description of an inquest (Model 23, Chapter XX) in his "The Damned Thing."

The advantage of any of these nonscenic methods is not only that an unfamiliar (but interesting) theme is clearly stated before the story starts, but also that the reader is approached gradually, so that the unfamiliarity may not alienate him by any abruptness. Furthermore, should the writer possess a distinctive and engaging style, he is able to take the reader into his confidence, and to win his good will for the story that is to follow.

II

One device typical of narrative and employed by good stylists to arouse curiosity in advance, without gratifying it completely, is a more or less veiled statement, in summary, of the central image, or even of the plot. A similar practice is employed by moving-picture producers in advertising a coming film. They select the most appetizing moments, but run them together without sequence. The audience thus gets a taste of the thing. They must come next week and pay another admission for the complete story. Editors of certain fiction magazines pursue the same course when they preface each story with a kind of prospectus, to inform the reader slightly of the contents, but mainly to allure. To give this kind of advance notice a convenient label, we will call it the *image-prospectus.*

MODEL 30. *Of a Hand and a Flower*

Once upon a time in London there was a young gentleman who had nothing better to do one afternoon, so

what should he do but take a walk? Now he did not set out as one on pleasure bent, but with an air of determination that would have surprised his friends, saying between his teeth: "I have heard that walking is good exercise. I will try a bit." However, he had not walked far before circumstances compelled him to abate his ardor, for it was an afternoon in July and quite warm for that time of the year.

Eastward our young gentleman strode, by Sloane Street, through Knightsbridge, across Hyde Park Corner, he strode even from Chelsea to Mayfair; for he was by way of being a writer and lived in Chelsea, whereas his people lived in Mayfair and understood nothing.

Now while we are about it we may as well add that the young writer's father was a baronet who had for some years been a perfect martyr to bankruptcy, and had called his son to him on this afternoon to impress upon him the fact that in future he, the young writer's father, could not and would not be a victim to his, the young writer's, extravagances. So much, then, for the young writer's father; but with himself we must continue yet a while, although what this tale is really about is a hand and a flower.

For that is what he chanced to see on the afternoon that we tell of, a hand and a flower; and since it was inconceivable that the hand could belong to a man, so white and delicate it was, he put two and two together and decided that it could only belong to a lady. Further, there was that about the droop of the hand which fired him to think of it as the hand of an unhappy heart. While as for the flower, it was scarlet, and of the sort that anyone can buy at any florist's by going in and saying: "I want some carnations, please, but not white ones, please, thank you, good-day."

MICHAEL ARLEN, *Mayfair*, "Prologue"

It would be a shame to spoil the story by telling it. Better that the reader, bitten by curiosity, should get a copy of *Mayfair* and read the tale for himself. He will then see that his interest has been whetted by a very clever assembling of the central imagery—the young man, the young lady, her sadly drooping hand, and the flower of romance. These are yet to be arranged in their detailed associations, so the story remains to be told. But the mere presentation of the imagery stirs the mind with eagerness to read on.

Since this is an introduction, not merely to one story, but to a volume whose scene is London, note how the second paragraph traces the young man's walk across the city, mentioning the names of streets known to many readers, and halting at last at the objective Point—Mayfair, the "social" capital.

What instances of conflict do you find? Of vivid imagery? Of inversion?

MODEL 31. *The Story in a Nut-Shell*

Heatherleigh . . . the nicest doctor that ever was . . . maintains that overwork slew Pansay, who died under his hands about three years ago. He has, of course, the right to speak authoritatively, and he laughs at my theory that there was a crack in Pansay's head and a little bit of the Dark World came through and pressed him to death. "Pansay went off the handle," says Heatherleigh, "after the stimulus of long leave at home. He may or he may not have behaved like a blackguard to Mrs. Keith-Wessington. My notion is that the work of the Katabundi Settlement ran him off his legs, and that he took to brooding and making much of an ordinary

P & O flirtation. He certainly was engaged to Miss Mannering, and she certainly broke off the engagement. Then he took a feverish chill and all that nonsense about ghosts developed. Overwork started his illness, kept it alight, and killed him, poor devil. Write him off the system that uses one man to do the work of two and a half men.

KIPLING, "The Phantom 'Rickshaw"

This is the fifth paragraph of the story, and follows close upon the general exposition already given in Model 16, Chapter XVIII, and Model 27 Chapter XX.

The doctor's speech tells Pansay's story *in advance* in a kind of chronological unit. The important events are all there, but the intervals of time and detail are so great that the reader feels somehow a lack of conclusive association and therefore of clearness. So he must go on to the story itself. Kipling makes us feel that we have come upon a bit of gossip too meager to explain its elements, but so fascinating in its possibilities that we simply must look the matter up elsewhere. For example, reference is made to "ghosts," but very vaguely—almost maddeningly.

Kipling could afford to "give away" his plot because it is not the events that count, but their effect upon Pansay. Furthermore, Kipling wished to gain credence ahead of time for the supernatural element, so he prefaced the whole with a rationalistic explanation, the opinion of a man of science, necessarily based on a review, or synopsis, of the action. Although we have a notion of the coming events and their unnatural character, we press on to find out who Pansay and Mrs.

Keith-Wessington and Miss Mannering were, and to form our own opinion of "that nonsense about ghosts."

What we have still to learn is the concrete imagery of the conflict leading to the Point. What we have, therefore, is not a story, but only its prelude—the image-prospectus.

As has been said before, such an introduction, or any introduction involving great tact in meeting the reader part way, is delightful in the hands of a master. It would be a dangerous assumption for the novice, in advance of public recognition, to credit himself with such charm.

III

Rather than rely on his own fascinations, he might more sensibly resort to the tried-and-true tools of the craft, and begin with a scene. This would be good counsel even for the professional. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* perhaps the finest work of sheer art in all fiction, opens with a single sentence stating the theme, and then goes immediately into its famous introductory scene. The same is true of other remarkable pieces; for, granted that the writer have any technical tact at all, he will find this method the simplest to execute effectively.

There are, however, certain conditions that militate more confusingly against an opening scene than against one in the body of the story. Before the writer's fancy lie all the things he wishes to say—and many of which he is doubtful. The result often is, even with those

who should know better, that the introduction is off the theme, or not too close to it. There is a resemblance between such a writer and the man who had so many things to do that he went fishing. The real job is postponed, while the man loiters. In a gifted loiterer this is all very fetching. In an ordinary mortal it is rank mental laziness. And laziness is a thing the reader is not likely to forgive in the person whose task it is to divert him.

Yet the idler who saunters into his theme several paragraphs late is hardly so criminal an offender as the hasty fellow who dashes into it too quickly, and then hastens nervously through his introduction in the anxiety that he is saying too much. Not until you have hinted your Point, not until the main personages, or the main sort of personages, are mentioned in at least salient reference, not until your conflict is at least anticipated as a definite issue—not before this can you proceed to the manipulations of the middle scenes. It is possible, in certain types of novels, to introduce new action, new characters, and even a new Point at any stage of the proceedings; but the brevity of the short story demands a stricter unity. You must sound all your dominant notes very early. Otherwise, the conflict may have to be interrupted, or even disastrously altered, to accommodate the necessary interpolation of matter inartistically delayed. Suppose, for example, it be necessary for your climax that the hero, a lawyer, has had youthful employment as a blacksmith. If no mention of this is made until the lawyer makes a horse-

shoe, the reader is going to be so startled by the abruptness of any explanation that you may offer, that he will probably put your effort down in disgust. Why? Because, as any one might gather from the word itself, but as not every one does—an introduction must introduce.

That does not mean that you must tell the story of your father's life, or recount his business methods in detail, when you are introducing to him the man who wants to buy the old gray mare. It is possible to offend as deeply by tedium as by discourteous haste. Pity is the kindliest motive one may feel toward the beginner who, in presenting his heroine, must mirror every tint of her lovely coloring before going on to—and sometimes without regard of—the essentials of his story. Just as the counsel of the foregoing paragraph was to be sure to state theme, conflict, and persons clearly in the introduction, so, conversely, state these—once and with emphasis—and no more. Don't be garrulous. You know how you despise the person who must drag his appendix into an account of how he led off with three aces. Stick to your Point. When you are reasonably certain that you have made it, go on to the next section.

There are some mechanical devices that will aid you: Use brief sentences. It has been said that good modern style averages eighteen words to the sentence. Use no voluted periods, in whose graceful coils the superfluous detail and the unnecessary modifier lie dull to clog the interest. And, even in short sentences, do not use more than one adjective to the noun, or more than one

adverb at all—none, if you can help it. Select the nouns, select especially the verbs, and the action will picture itself beyond the need of qualification. A novice sometimes spends hours working out a bit of "fine" writing or a stroke of characterization which one moment's thought would have cast aside as Pointless.

Do not write more than your introduction at one sitting. Rather, sit back, and compare what you have said with what is contained in the Point-Scene. Often you will find that either of the two contains matter that should go into the middle, and thus deprives that long, hard stretch of some of its content. No matter how excellently, therefore, your introduction seems to prepare you to proceed, drop your pencil and throw your energies into a mental bridging of the gulf between beginning and end. You may find, thus, that the introduction is not so good as you thought. Miserable though the realization be, better that it come early, than that it lie in wait to spring upon you when you have written your story half through.

If necessary, re-write the introduction several times till it is complete and clear on the one hand, but, on the other, lean and swift.

Exercises

A. *Analysis*

Analyze several introductions of contemporary or classic stories, to determine how the authors related the beginning to the Point and the middle scenes.

B. *Narrative*

Plan and execute the introduction of your story. Consider, in connection with your needs, the comparative value and availability of the scene, the pantomimic scene, the anecdote, the typical instance, the chronological unit, and the image-prospectus. Unless it be quite impossible, try the scene.

Suggested Readings

Clark, G.—*A Manual of the Short Story Art*, Part I, Chapter XI.

Esenwein, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story*, Part II, Chapters VII and VIII.

Grabo, C. H.—*The Art of the Short Story*, Chapters V and VI.

Chapter XXII

PLOT: VII, TYPES OF STRUCTURE; TRANSITIONS

I

The character of structure varies infinitely in various stories. There are, however, only two extremes that may be mentioned distinctly.

The one is the string of scenes or other elements loosely joined, each part bearing out the Point in a new and more interesting manner than the one before, the total effect being emphasis by repetition and variation. Bret Harte's "Tennessee's Partner" is so built. Each structural element brings out the trait of loyalty. Of the same form are certain juvenile stories, like *Frank Merriwell,* whose episodic chapters alternate between two Points—sport and violence. A thin thread of conflict between the hero and some villain is taken up and dropped at will so that, though it is not lost sight of, it does not intrude upon the peculiar fascination of the great home-run scene, or the thrilling rescue from the bandits. Such structure lends itself readily to publication by parts, especially in how-it-happened serials, such as journalistic narratives of engaged couples, newlyweds, or young folk in search of a career or marital bliss.

The other sort of construction is based on the preservation of unity. The entire plot is gripped and presented as one. The parts may not readily be dissociated. Sometimes they are singly almost meaningless, so necessary is their union. Poe's "Gold Bug" is such a story. Indeed, most of his tales are stamped with the Greek principle of one action; and some, like "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Pit and the Pendulum," are also confined to one time and one place. A contemporary instance of the writer who can produce a single effect in unified structure is the excellent and gifted Wilbur Daniel Steele.

Between the two methods there is all the difference one may discern between a village of homes housing one thousand people, and a single tenement of the same population. In one case, each home is more an entity; in the other, more a unit in a larger organism. The distinction lies rather in the degree of union than in union versus disunion, as far as the families are concerned. But in the types of building there is no comparison at all. The farmhouse stands by itself. The apartment is joined to its neighbors by a frame of steel.

However, there are such things as two- or three-family houses, and also small apartment dwellings. So one varies the structure of the story to fit the needs of the narrative population, either scattering the units on large but contiguous farms, or fitting them all into cubicles raised into the air, floor by floor, on one small plot.

II

Since the looser types of structure present comparatively little difficulty, so long as the Point appears in each unit and a slight thread of conflict joins all together, let us attend to the more complicated form. This may be said to depend entirely on the law of association—the employment of one sole criterion, or Point, to subordinate less important within more important, and to unite as it apportions.

There are five domains in which one may or must carry out this principle:

I. *Content*

Tell only one story of one person, or mainly of one person, or of one group of people acting as one person. If possible, conceive your action in one place, and confine it to one continuous period of time.

II. *Form*

A. Move from the scene you are writing to a scene containing similar images, conflict, etc. (Contrast is a form of association by opposites. Since, however, the differences must be subordinated to the Point, contrasted elements should be comparatively brief and unimportant.)

B. Maintain one *attitude of mind,* and one "tone" throughout. Do not alternate—especially not abruptly—from seriousness to irony, from tragedy to humor, from pathos to caricature. Do not hasten through a big scene, or dawdle over a mere anecdote. The tempo is that of the climactic, or Point-Scene, and should not vary at random.

C. Maintain one style of speech. This means the observance of consistency not merely in such incidentals as dialect, but in employing one of the three forms of usage: literary speech, vernacular or familiar, or slang.

D. Stress one principle of action. If your story involves

1. Peripety, or complete reverse of fortune, you may employ another principle incidentally, but not in such fashion as to becloud the first or even to rival it. Other principles are:
2. Recognition: Œdipus learns his identity. Two long-lost brothers find each other by means of clews, etc.
3. Discovery: The detective runs down and apprehends the criminal. The hero realizes that he is face to face with his enemy. The foundling finds his parents.
4. Simple alternation: (See Chapter VI).
5. Climax: (See Chapter XIV).

(Section D does not apply to novels, but should hold for short stories.)

All five principles of action must be referred to the reader's understanding of them, regardless of whether the characters understand them or not. EXAMPLES: A character may not understand that his fortunes are being reversed, but the reader must know. Similarly, it is not sufficient that the detective discover the identity of the criminal; the reader must be informed, and in detail.

III. *Transitions*

One important instrument of unity is continuity. Sharp breaks or unexplained gaps in the action tend to divert the attention of the reader from the trend of

the story to the consideration of the method. The result is confusion, not unity. Transitions, according to their importance as regards the Point, may be whole scenes, bits of dialogue, pantomimes, chronological units, anecdotes, typical instances, or even single sentences (events) or phrases (images). In order to maintain the narrative method, transitions should contain images and action, and in the more extended instances, may have conflict, climax, dialogue, inversion. For association, the imagery, etc., should be related to that of contiguous sections; and for unity, there should be regard for the maintenance of the Point.

IV. *Language*

Since a transition moves from a preceding Point to its own Point, the introductory sentence should contain wording, not repetitive of but synonymous with the preceding, and also anticipatory of its own Point.

EXAMPLE: (A bear hunt) The next step was to skin the beast before getting to lunch.

Likewise, the Point of a transitional passage should be so worded as to carry on to what follows.

EXAMPLE: The great shaggy hide was pegged and stretched. The morning's work was finished.

"You get the water for the coffee," said Hank, "and I'll start the fire."

V. *Connectives*

Do not rely exclusively on *and, but, or.* Learn to substitute for *but:* the weaker forms *yet, however, nevertheless, however,* etc. For *and*: *therefore, similarly, likewise, moreover, in addition,* etc. Some of these

are especially useful in connecting paragraphs or whole sections. Do not always place these at the beginnings of sentences. A subtler coupling results from holding the connective to the end, or "burying" it in the middle of a sentence. Variety is the best practice, however.

III

In the writing of the complete rough draft of your story, you will have two forces very much to your advantage—the last scene and the first. Your expression may falter and grope, but fancy can weave back and forth from a definite starting point to a fixed Point. And you have the synopsis and the various outlines to guide you—especially the outline by scenes.

Read your introduction till you can visualize the next important scene. However, do not hasten to write. Writing means words, the words the reader depends on for his clear and immediate understanding of your theme. And the likelihood is that before he can continue to Scene 2 he will need a bridge of words from Scene 1.

This transition, the first in the story, is very often the most significant. There may be an episode of the character's life, too long for the introduction proper, but necessary, as part of the greater introduction, for the better comprehension of the ensuing conflict. The first transition, likewise, is often the longest. The reader, held by Scene 1, is more willing to spend time getting acquainted, at this stage, than he will be to slow the quickened force of the action later. For this

reason it is quite common that, after the initial scene, there should be an anecdote, or one of the other narrative forms, or even a passage of description, exposition, argument.

No matter how long such a section is, it should be no longer than is necessary to reinforce the first scene in preparation toward the others. Indeed, if the transition between the first two scenes involves only a brief interval of time, or a short change of place, such as movement from one room to another, or any change at all that will most likely be comprehended by the reader with ease, it may be possible to cut the transition down to a sentence, a clause, a phrase. The main thing is that the gulf must be bridged in so many words, and not left for the reader to vault of his own power. Therefore a fairly long transition should most certainly be Pointed.

The advantages of a careful writing of this section are not altogether on the side of the reader. The author will find that his own comprehension of the action is vastly improved by the verbal clarification. He will proceed to Scene 2 with a basis in understanding and a momentum in assurance that may carry him all the way through to the end. However, unless he has rather remarkable stamina, he had better proceed at the rate of a few sections a day, not so much making progress, as making sure of his progress as he goes.

Each scene should be complete and of greater interest than the one before. As the tale progresses,

the transitions should be diminished in length but augmented in narrative content. Some phase of the central conflict should be *expressed* in every part, with a constant tightening of the struggle as the ending approaches.

Exercises

1. Number the paragraphs of a brief story by O. Henry or De Maupassant. Outline the tale by scenes, transitions, etc., using the paragraph numbers to show the lines of division. Examine each section for the nature of its form (scene, anecdote, etc.), and note how the conflict is expressed in each.

2. Review your outline by scenes. Can you profitably convert or combine some of them into other forms—pantomime, typical instance, etc.? If so, make a note of the alteration on the outline, and by review of the models, consider how you are to effect the change.

3. Write a rough draft of your story.

Suggested Readings

Baker, H. T.—*The Contemporary Short Story*, Chapter III.
Esenwein, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story*, Part II, Chapters IX and X.
Grabo, Carl H.—*The Art of the Short Story*, Chapters I, II and VI.

Chapter XXIII

TITLES

A TITLE has been compared to an article of goods in a display window. It entices the passer to stop and view it, and it gives a notion of the stock inside.

The latter function—that of index to the contents—obviously connects the title with the Point. It is far from necessary that the two be identical. In fact, a Point often makes a poor title: *rage, revenge, excitement, how a ship sinks.* It is preferable to make the Point concrete in a symbol prominent throughout, or emphasized in the Point-Scene.

When the action is the outstanding element, we have such titles as *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* or "An Incident at Owl Creek Bridge." The central character or characters may serve to name the piece: *David Copperfield, Janice Meredith, Peter Whiffle, The Freelands;* or some characterization, such as *The Spy, Old Mortality,* "The Man Without a Country," *The Wandering Jew, The Virginian, The Three Musketeers,* "The Outcasts of Poker Flat."

Sometimes the locale is of sufficient importance to serve as the title: *Treasure Island,* "The Luck of Roaring Camp," *Red Rock, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Wuthering Heights, Grub Street, The House of the Seven Gables, Green Mansions.*

Symbols, especially if they are of interest in themselves, make excellent names: "The Gold Bug," "The Pit and the Pendulum," *The Scarlet Letter,* "The Great Stone Face," *The Octopus, Desert Gold, Main Street.* Such titles serve to arouse curiosity as to their meaning, as do unusual words, or names of foreign or imaginary persons or scenes: *Penguin Island,* "Tamango," *Quentin Durward, The Master of Ballantrae, The Forsyte Saga,* "The Phantom 'Rickshaw," *Utopia,* "Humoresque," *Moby Dick, Barnaby Rudge, Tono-Bungay.*

For mystery or adventure stories, the title should be a kind of puzzle, or a gesture of romance: *The Sign of the Four, The Mystery of the Yellow Room,* "What was it?" "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," *The Turn of the Screw;* "The Man Who Would Be King," "The Drums of the Fore and Aft," "The Suicide Club," *Westward Ho!*

One could go on forever with such a listing of not merely names but types, for the variations are infinite. Besides, what would serve to label one tale excellently, would not do at all for another. The author can best be guided by his intuition and the advice of well-read friends. So long as the title arouses interest and has some bearing on the Point, the end is achieved. Generally, too, euphony is a virtue. Such a designation as "Peter Johnson's Sassafras Experiment" might better be softened to "The Great Sassafras Experiment," or just "Sassafras."

Brevity, here as elsewhere, has the merit of ready

attractiveness; there are those who would set a four-word limit, as in the case of advertising slogans. Yet there are enough famous stories to prove the contrary. Some are named from quotations or allusions: *The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck, Far From the Madding Crowd.* In some, the length is relieved by the familiarity of the expression: "One of Those Nice Little Evenings," *It Never Can Happen Again.* There are others, however, which are good despite their length, and for no better reason than that they are good! One instance may serve as a classic—*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court!*

Exercises

1. Go through a fiction catalogue, or any such list, and study the titles. Which ones attract you? Can you tell why? (This is good training at any time. Should a good title occur to you, keep a note of it in your portfolio. It may grow into a plot.)

2. Write several titles for your story, as they come to you. Then, if you have none for one of the following categories, see how many you can invent:

The central image
The central action, or conflict
The main character, or group
The setting
The time, or period
An important motive
A custom, or other social practice or problem
A dominating emotion
A symbol of some prominence, or of unifying character
A quotation or an allusion
Mystery

Romance
The climax
The point
(*a*) In imagery
(*b*) In an abstract noun
(*c*) In a phrase, a clause, or a short sentence
(*d*) In a long sentence

Show your list to a number of widely varying people, and ask them to "vote" for the three best. Choose your title on the basis of your own preference, popular interest, and a fair representation of the Point.

Suggested Readings

Esenwein, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story*, Part II, Chapter XIII.
Grabo, Carl H.—*The Art of the Short Story*, Chapter XI.

Chapter XXIV

STYLE AND READING; REVISING THE ROUGH DRAFT

I

STYLE for the amateur has been defined best by Dean Swift—Proper words in proper places. Say what you mean. Say it clearly. If you can do this, you are a stylist. The greatest have done no more; for when a man speaks his mind's thought he has given the reader himself; and half the style is the expression of personality.

There are those who would urge the young writer to imitate great masters, and there are those who decry the practice, counseling him to speak his mind out as the spirit dictates. The truth lies between. On the one hand, it is excellent practice to analyze a passage from Hardy or Thackeray or Stevenson, and to reproduce the manner in a paragraph of original theme. Excellent practice—but no more than that. Absorb whatever you can, anywhere and everywhere, but absorb it truly. Let it become part of your tissue, your second nature, so that when you come to write you will follow no model or combination of models consciously.

Ten or fifteen years ago, the fiction of college publications tasted like dilute Kipling or re-hashed O. Henry. Nowadays, Wilde, Cabell, and Shaw are the "best

form." Ten or fifteen years from now it will be some one else again. This is probably fine gymnastics. Yet, somehow or other, such out-and-out copyings do not get themselves into the public prints. If the reader wants Kipling and Wilde, he knows where to look for them. What he wants from you is something worth while in the way of yourself. Give him the creatures of your fancy in the patterns of your own creation, the straightforward speech of your own soul.

That does not mean that you must go out and acquire a soul that cannot possibly be mistaken for any other soul. You have it, to begin with. Even if you hadn't, you needn't worry about it. Just get your imagery on paper, and give the reader a chance to exercise his own soul. A great many novices are not content unless their style is "original." Just what they mean by "original" they find it hard to say. Maybe the plain truth of the thing is that in the spring the young man's fancy gravely turns to thoughts of wide public notice. But most editors are cynics, with a perverted sense of humor, and there you are. If you feel that you must be "different," if you are willing to run the risk of public contempt or indifference toward obscurity, bombast, freakishness, go ahead. It's your privilege. You may be right. You may in time prevail. It might be wiser, however, to let your writing denote your ideas simply, and to take the chance of growing a style naturally, intimately, half-consciously, as you grow up.

II

The foregoing advice to absorb whatever you can, anywhere and everywhere, means one thing before all others—reading. It is safe to say that no great stylist, and few great writers, failed to read, and to read ravenously, and whole-heartedly, from childhood to old age. The exceptions are not numerous enough to debate the rule. A man should know his own craft.

Now, there are two ways to read. One is to enjoy, to let the great man breathe into you the spirit of his being, so that he creates twice. There can be no doubt that sheer enjoyment of art is one of the finest varieties of criticism. It may even be that the reasoning which follows is but the rationalization of a preference or a dislike. Yet reason (nay, even rationalizing) is as true to human nature as is pleasure; and he is only half a reader who is not at times spontaneously moved to analysis and comparison.

When you read Howells, therefore, or Jane Austen, or Flaubert, or Henry James, or Chekhov, you should know that you are dealing in the main with Realism—the sort of fantasy which seeks to reproduce the phenomena of life as they are, and not as the spirit would mold or alter or omit or select. Such writers try to give you life back again, but with one subtle difference. They transform you from a participant into an onlooker. Whether they show a great battle or a vile brawl, you are not in the fight. You have a ring-side seat.

Most people do not like this sort of thing. They do not wish any more of life than they already have. They demand of art that it be different from life—better, happier, more exciting. They turn from their neighborhoods and jobs to other places, occupations, times. For them, Romance—the human spirit triumphing over—or at least escaping from—bald fact and harsh phenomena. And if amid their own lives of hard struggle, triumph seems too hard to believe,—then off to India or the Poles!—back to ancient Rome!—on to Utopia!—where experience cannot moderate fancy with fact, as it does at home. For the salesgirl standing bored and weary behind her counter, let us have tales of the gilded, idle, irresponsible rich, as in the movies, or the novels of Robert W. Chambers. For those whose lives are soft and sedentary and enslaving to civilization, let us have the novels of Joseph Conrad, with their tropic storms, wild beasts and untamed savages, their mud and their vermin, and all modern inconveniences. And for those to whom any reality, however remote in space or time, is simple hell—let us have an escape into the fairyland of Wilde, the dreamworld of Barrie, even the nightmare midnight of Poe!

The Romanticists have been crossed, in our day, with a breed that would, fleeing from life, still turn to read its riddle. Those who are more serious read books like Hutchinson's *If Winter Comes,* and speak earnestly of the splendid "characterization." Actually, there are no characters in that volume at all. What

we have are characteristics, or phases of character, going under the names of persons. Love is called Mark Sabre, as though a man could be all love; his wife is representative of worldly wisdom. All this is only a little less obvious than in the old morality play of *Everyman,* or Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress;* but only because the traits carry names of citizens, instead of names of abstractions. This sort of thing—a combination of allegory, psychology, and preaching—has brought forth a whole library of latter-day parables to feed the great religious hunger that followed the War. Nor have the more skeptical been without narrative pabulum for despair—*The Blind Bow-Boy* of Carl Van Vechten, and Cabell's *Jurgen* and *The High Place.* These have revived the eighteenth century's acid comment on life, and the eighteenth century's assurance that all men may be typified in Man—not to omit Woman!

So there are readers who wish to study life, to enjoy it, to escape it, or all three; and so we have Realism, Romanticism, Didacticism, and a whole boneyard of ologies and movements. To know them—and you should know them—you must go to libraries and to the public prints, year in, year out, with a never-failing absorption in your craft, an unappeasable curiosity for good tricks, old or new.

Join whatever school you wish. Flit from one to the other. Unite the teachings of one with the teachings of another. But study your lessons first and always.

III

In revising the structure of your rough draft, follow the procedure of Exercise 1, Chapter XXII. When you have numbered the paragraphs, and divided and labeled the sections, study each division carefully. If it displeases you, it may be miscast in form—a scene where you should have an anecdote, a typical instance where a few sentences of exposition might be briefer and more interesting. Such formal errors sometimes need the rough draft to reveal their existence. Don't be discouraged. Be glad that you can improve your work, of your own power.

Cut out anything that even seems superfluous. In the case of a passage that is dull, but which cannot be omitted, increase or vary the image content, or supply action, conflict, dialogue, or inversion. In any instance, let your criteria be: the Point of the specific division, the matter of transition, and the Point of the whole.

Where there are too many jerky short sentences, subordinate some of them into phrases and clauses. Where too many long sentences clog the action, cut them into shorter and quicker lengths. Go through the piece at least once for the omission of words, for ambiguous expressions, for repetition and tautology. Correct every mechanical error of spelling, grammar, punctuation. Make all corrections on the rough draft directly. Do not take "mental notes." They have a way of dropping out of mind.

Exercises

1. Revise your rough draft, following the instructions of Section III, above; and of Exercise 1, Chapter XXII.

2. After an interval of rest, and working slowly and carefully, write your story in its final form. Typewrite, if you can. Use double space throughout. On every page, write the number and the title. Typewrite a separate title page containing the title, the approximate number of words, and your name and address. Make a carbon copy for reference, since your manuscript may get lost in the mail.

When you send the manuscript to a publisher, enclose a stamped and self-addressed envelope. Do not guess the amount of postage. Go to the post office and obtain exact information. (For further instructions, see Chapter XXV.)

Suggested Readings

Baker, H. T.—*The Contemporary Short Story,* Chapter V.
Clark, Glenn—*A Manual of the Short Story Art,* Part III, Chapters I and II.
Esenwein, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story,* Part II, Chapter XIV.

STYLE CARD [1]

1. The regular order of the sentence is Subject—Predicate.

2. Make up your mind what you intend to write about and select this as the subject of your sentence. If you are speaking about *Five Men,* say: *Five Men* climbed the hill; if you are speaking about the hill say: *The hill* was climbed by five men.

[1] By courtesy of Lewis F. Mott, Professor of the English Language and Literature, College of the City of New York.

3. Whatever words qualify the subject, or any other noun, must be attached directly to it, without any intervening words: *e. g.* Five men who had volunteered. The hill in front of the camp.

4. On the same principle, whatever words qualify the predicate verb must be attached directly to it: *e. g.* Five men *slowly* climbed the hill.

5. Put adverbial expressions of time at the beginning of the sentence: *In the morning* or *Yesterday* or *On the tenth of February,* five men climbed the hill.

6. The same rule holds generally for expressions of place: *Here* or *At Yonkers* or *On a rough part of the road* there was a hill. If both time and place are mentioned, time comes first and place may follow the verb: *On the tenth of February* five men climbed a hill *at Yonkers.*

7. Clauses beginning with *because, if, unless* or *though* should be placed at the beginning of the sentence: *If it rains,* I will not go.

8. Any words in a sentence that refer to a preceding sentence come at the beginning, *e. g.* We came to a steep hill. *This hill* five men climbed on the tenth of February.

N. B. To these rules there are exceptions; the important point is to acquire the habit of placing words according to the directions given; the exceptions will take care of themselves.

Chapter XXV

CONCLUSION

Those who are artists for Art's sake take counsel as well as courage from within. They write for their own pleasure, presumably, finding in the joy of the work a recompense beyond applause. Their sincerity is not to be doubted or ridiculed.

Yet narrative is certainly a social art. It presumes an audience as truly as does the drama. Hence there is more justification in trying to give the public what it wants than one might judge possible from the sneers of rebels or self-conscious æsthetes. Homer and Shakespeare, Beethoven and Michelangelo responded to the wishes of the great masses of their day, making enormous contributions of their own, but keeping one finger ever on the public pulse. Howells, as sane and catholic a critic as we have yet had in America, said that he invariably enjoyed contemporary literature as much as the classics, and sometimes more. Why not? In his time, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Meredith, Hardy, Gissing, Butler, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoievsky, Anatole France, Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Sudermann, Hauptmann, Mark Twain, Henry James, and scores of others were contemporaries, not classics. He lived to read and wel-

come Booth Tarkington and Montague Glass, of our own day. And we, for our part, still have Galsworthy, Wells, Shaw, Bennett, Barrie, May Sinclair, Edith Wharton, Cabell, Dreiser, Anderson, Ferber, and a host of younger men and women who, to-morrow, will be the classics of to-day. Why not read and enjoy great talents in the making?

Why not read the magazines? A careful study of them, over a year or more, will often help a young writer to find his public, his domain, and himself. For there is not one public, but innumerable "publics," —from the "high-brows" who represent the slender circulations of the "movements" to the vast and varied audiences of the great national and international weeklies and monthlies. There are the mentally jaded who wish detective stories and nothing but detective stories. There are the mentally crude who are impatient of anything but violent adventure or lurid sex. There is at least one public for every magazine that survives, and often more. To study one of these, to attempt to please it, to succeed—there is a more than laudable ambition for one's novitiate. Many an amateur, through such discipline, has risen high not merely in prosperity but in honor—from Mark Twain to Ring Lardner.

Like every other feature of the story-teller's work, this business of studying the market requires time, patience, and persistence in the face of failure. Magazines that appeal to a great many subscribers will naturally have a varied policy—too varied to be discovered from the reading of one or two numbers. It is

not possible for the editor to have, in every issue, stories of love, mystery, adventure, introspective psychology, or social, economic, and occupational themes. The numerous threads run through a warp and woof of months and preferences.

Besides, one does not wish to give the public merely what it has, or has had. Often, as in the mere aping of a style, the public itself forbids. What the true student of popular taste seeks, is the new variation of an old theme, or the new field of material—local, psychological, social, humorous—to be worked with the old machinery of the narrator's art. The best basis for such innovations and discoveries is, undoubtedly, a knowledge of current fiction so intimate as to make existing types and movements as familiar as personal friendships, old or new.

And, of course, toward this end there is no better approach than actual contact with editors and publishers. Let these gentlemen say what they will, and despite the fact that they really do search the mails eagerly for good material, it is nevertheless true that they can and do follow up an introduction far more often and more readily than they do a manuscript in a stamped envelope. Make connections. Take your efforts to the editorial office directly, and try to get some responsible person to talk about the needs of the publication. He may even offer helpful criticism, after you have visited him several times,—but don't ask for it!

How to go about all this is another matter. Indeed, it is a matter for another book—on Salesmanship, per-

haps, or Success. The problem is your own. Solve it as best you may.

You have always the postal service to fall back upon, at any rate. And if your work is good, or if you improve it till it is good, some one will take it ultimately. Do not tire of sending out a manuscript. On the other hand, do not go through life championing one sole story—your first—till some one takes it. A good worker in any field goes from the creation of one product to the creation of the next. Do not be afraid to try something "off your line," or too lazy to attempt subjects, methods, styles, which you could "handle easily, if you could only work up an interest in them."

You must count on a period during which you must find, not merely your outlet, but yourself. Above all—and this is far more important than mere stubborn pluck—use your head for thinking, not for butting.

Perhaps, even with all your effort (and all this fine advice) you will not succeed.

But if you do, it will be by no other means than hard work, patience, intelligence.

The prize is worth it.

Good luck go with you!

Suggested Readings

Technical Periodicals

The Writer, 1430 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Mass.
Bulletin of the Authors' League, 2 East 23rd Street, New York.

CONCLUSION

Texts

BAKER, H. T.—*The Contemporary Short Story,* Chapters VI and VII.

ESENWEIN, J. B.—*Writing the Short Story,* Part IV, and Appendix E.

WILDMAN, E.—*Writing to Sell* (Appleton).

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